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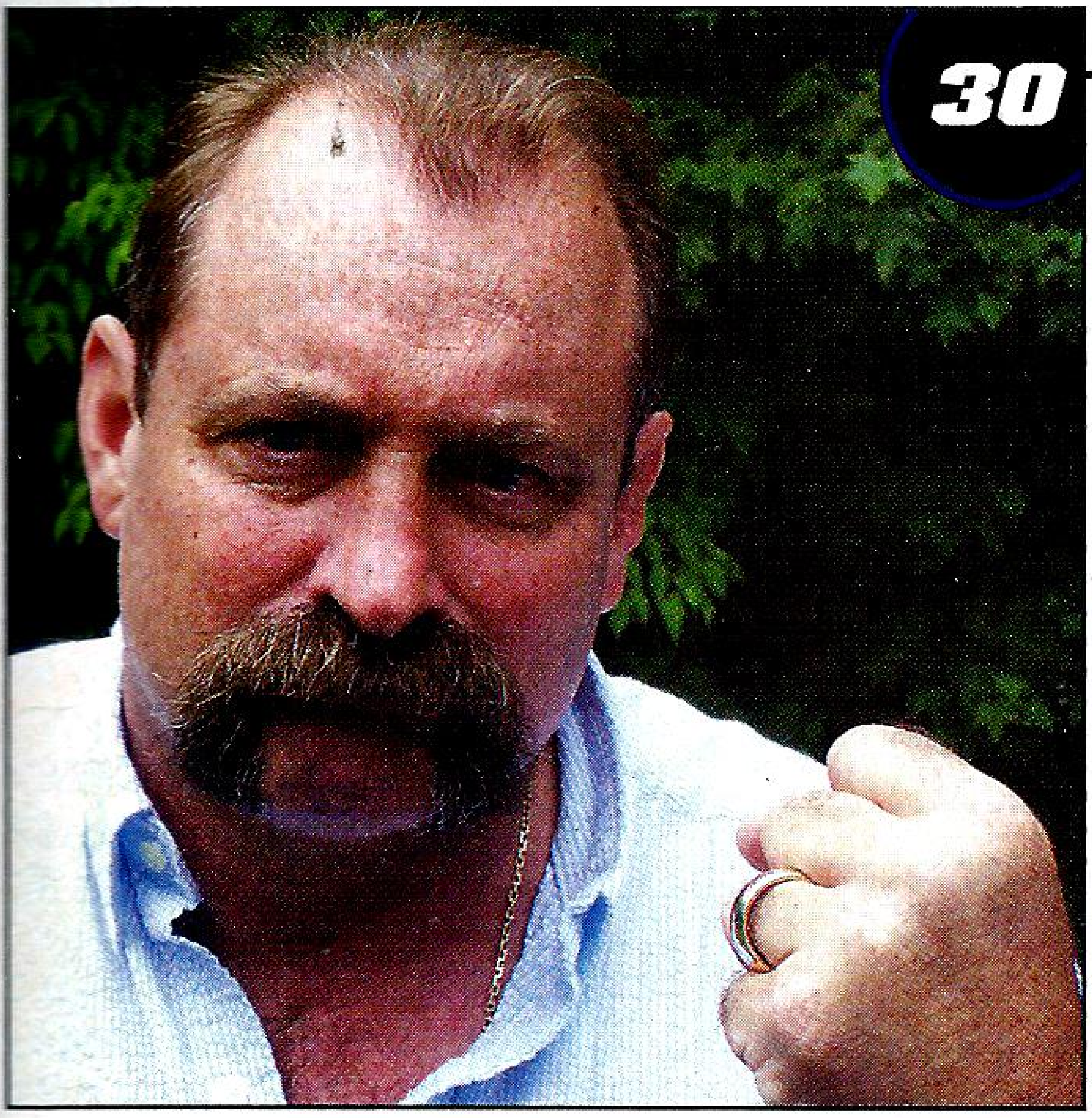

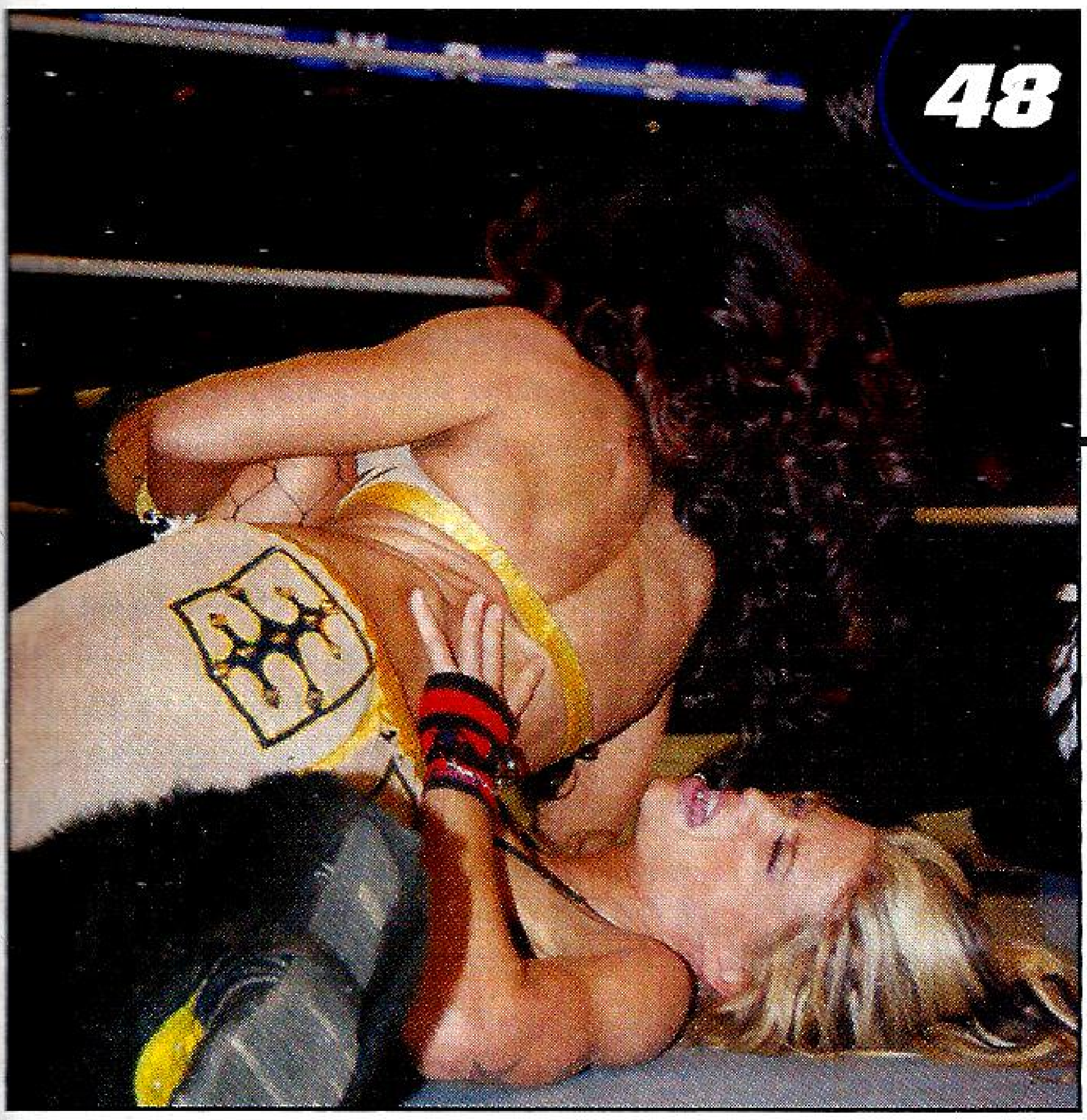

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COVER PHOTO:
George Napolitano

COVER DESIGN:
Sherry Stravino

Look for the Volume 18, 2007 issue of THE WRESTLER/*Inside Wrestling* on sale September 11, 2007.

your letters

RVD MIA

How much longer do we have to wait to see where RVD is going to go next? Of course, it would be great if he was contracted by TNA, but, really, I don't care where he goes. Just as long as he keeps wrestling I'll be a happy fan. He was gone for close to a year recouping from his injury, and that time without him was torture for a "Mr. Monday Night" fan like myself. I know that Rob deserves some time off, but I can't help being a little bit selfish. Wherever you are, Van Dam, come back soon!

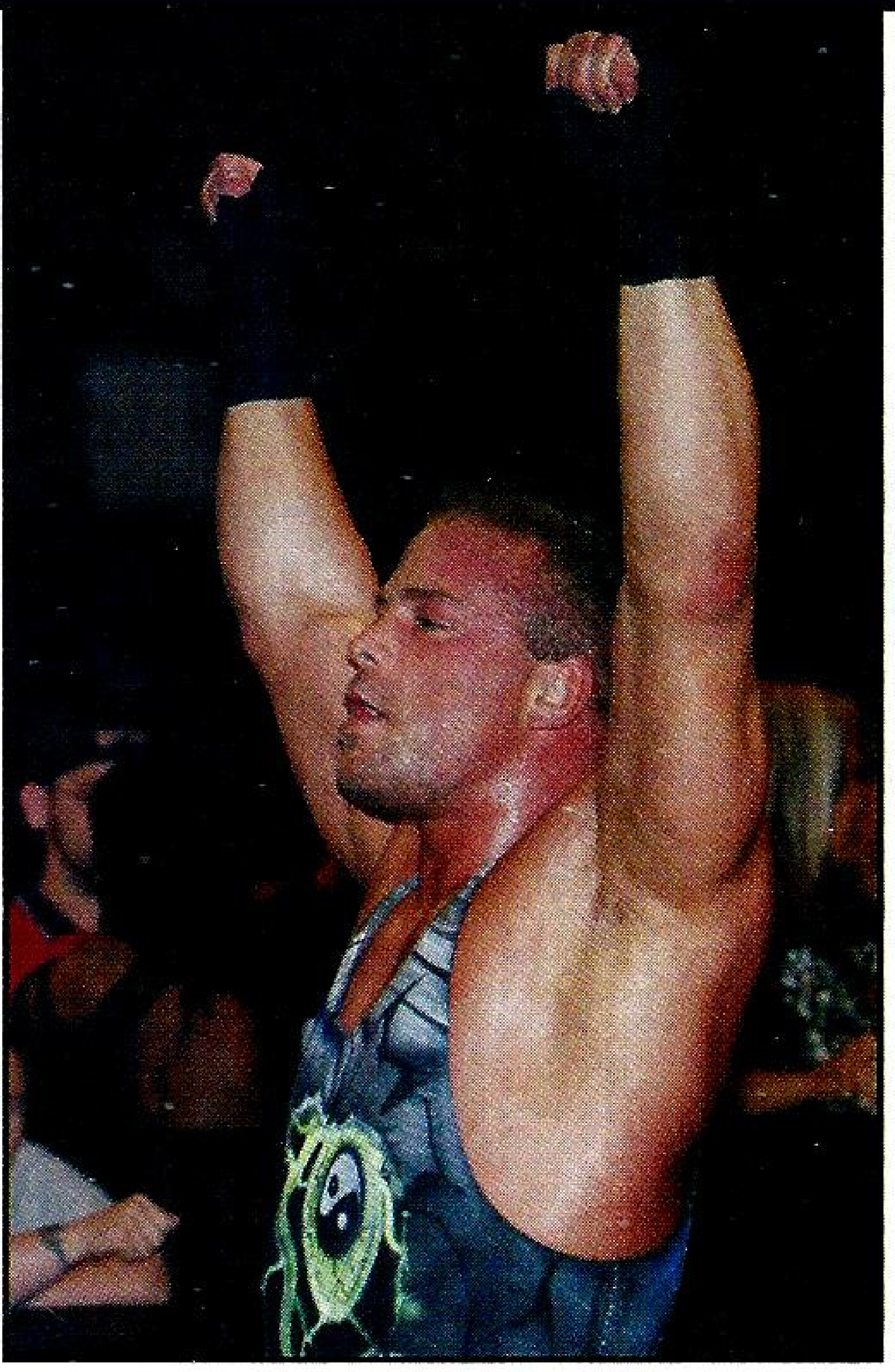
JEFF CARUSO
Redford, MI

WISHIN' AND HOPIN'

I don't know what to think in regard to the investigation surrounding the death of Mr. McMahon. I have never been a fan of the McMahon storylines, but I am inexplicably drawn to this one. It is so riveting that it even lured Stephanie out of hiding. I want to believe that someone is responsible for all of it, that his death will mean the end of the Mr. McMahon character, and that he will not be back on television. This would be the perfect ending of Vince's appearances on WWE, but I know better.

Vince is Vince, and the likely scenario is that he faked his own death only to return at the most opportune time. Oh, well. A guy can hope, right?

SAMUEL YERKES
ysamluvsfi@yahoo.com



Have we seen "Mr. Monday Night" raise his hands in triumph for the last time? Well, that seems to be the case—at least on WWE television. Reader and RVD fan Jeff Caruso just hopes the end of Van Dam's WWE contract doesn't mean the end of his whole career.

ON THE FENCE

Regarding whether title matches should be contested in gimmick matches, ("Point/Counterpoint," The Wrestler, Vol. 15, 2007), I am going to have to disagree with Lisa Rocchi. I would rather see a long, competitive, submission-style scientific bout than an "Elevation X" match. I think that some gimmick matches are good, such as ladder matches and last-man-standing matches. But others, such as "Buried Alive" and the "Last Rites" match between Sting and Abyss, were awful.

So I can't really choose either side because everything depends on the promotion's bookers, but for me, personally, a nice, competitive "Iron Man" match is best, but gimmick matches are all right for title matches too.

JESSE ADAMS
Bainbridge, OH

A DEVOTED SUBSCRIBER

I have been a reader and collector of both The Wrestler and *Inside Wrestling* for 26 years now and wanted to say that I really enjoy the combo and special issues you've been publishing for the past three years. They are the best you have done, and I always look forward to purchasing them. Thanks for great reading.

ROBERT COFFEY
South Gate, CA

DUTT'S UP WITH THAT?

I have to say that Sonjay Dutt's recent conversion to a life of peace and understanding has me not only baffled, but also fearing for his future in a sport where people have the most success when they're at their nastiest. At the same time, it's probably better that Sonjay does something like this now so that people will remember who he is when other guys—like "Black Machismo" Jay Lethal—get all the publicity.

I guess what I'm trying to say is that a kinder, gentler Sonjay doesn't make *me* fear his talent and I can't imagine that there's anyone in the X division that is shaking in his ring boots. Plus, what about all the people out there that may be offended that Sonjay and Kevin Nash are giving the appearance of making fun of their personal beliefs? There are many people out there who could view Sonjay's current path as offensive and an insensitive portrayal of something that means a lot to them! I think Sonjay would be better off letting his talent shine through and not get caught up in the superficial nature of the sport.

Ditch Nash, Sonjay! You'll be better off for it!

ROSE BARRETT
Auburn Hills, MI

They say nice guys finish last—but let's hope, for the sake of Sonjay Dutt and his fans, that saying is just a myth. Reader Rose Barrett is concerned about Dutt and feels his relationship with Kevin Nash will harm his career.

SAY IT, SISTER!

First off, I want to thank Romana Tamm of London, England, for telling it like it is in her letter in the Vol. 15, 2007, edition of THE WRESTLER/*Inside Wrestling* ("Can't See Enough Of Cena"). John Cena is the classiest World champion in recent memory. He deserves to be right where he is—at the top. He has won tough matches such as the last-man-standing match vs. Umaga at the Royal Rumble, his "I Quit" match vs. John Bradshaw Layfield at Judgment Day 2005, and his match against Triple-H at WrestleMania 22. This man is a fighter and a winner, and he is the reason I watch Raw.

I am a "Chain Gang" member, and there is nothing that is going to change my mind. All you Cena-haters should remember that he has fans that will put you in your place.

LISA KNOWLTON
Barberton, OH

BIG, BAD BOOTY-FUL TRIBUTE

It's truly unfortunate that as soon as "Big Poppa Pump" Scott Steiner seemed to have turned a corner in his TNA career, he suffered an injury to his trachea down in Puerto Rico. I was worried about his health at first, but when I heard that he would recover, my thoughts turned to TNA and the gaping hole "Freakzilla's" loss would mean.

Before Slammiversary, the feud between the reunited Steiner Brothers and Team 3D was some of the most compelling stuff in all of wrestling. Two of the greatest tag teams of the modern era, squaring off head-to-head with the gold on the line, had all the makings of a classic. Now that Steiner's out, it seems as if there's no attitude left in the TNA tag division. It's just not the same without Scott and Rick staring down their opponents and chasing the title.

Get well soon, Scott! Love you or hate you, the fans of TNA most definitely miss you.

GEORGE NOTTE
Binghamton, NY

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what's happening?

By Brady Hicks

AS THIS ISSUE of The Wrestler was about to go to press, we learned of the enormous tragedy involving **Chris** and **Nancy Benoit**, and their seven-year-old son, **Daniel**. The bodies of all three were found on June 25 in the Benoit family home in Fayetteville, Georgia. Investigators are treating the case as a double murder/suicide, and the Associated Press has reported that Chris Benoit strangled his wife, Nancy, on June 22, smothered his son, Daniel, on June 23, and hanged himself on June 24. Chris was only 40 years old and Nancy was 43.

Benoit, citing a family emergency, missed two dates, including WWE's Vengeance, during the same weekend, raising concern among company officials. A neighbor also became concerned and notified local authorities, who found the bodies.

The former Raw World champion's accomplishments in pro wrestling were extraordinary; his actions over the course of those three days, however, were inexplicable. Nancy, known as Woman during a career that spanned the NWA, ECW, and WCW over a 15-year period, will also be remembered as an exceptional figure in the business.

Not surprisingly, the fallout and outpouring of emotions throughout the wrestling world have been tremendous, and the circumstances regarding Benoit's death and those of his wife and son—and the impact of his death on the industry—will be explored for some time to come. Also keep in mind that references to Benoit throughout this issue of The Wrestler/*Inside Wrestling* predate this tragedy.

The rest of the news seems rather mundane.

Apparently, **Tommy Dreamer** and **The Sandman** will be forced to find

The Benoits were a happy couple 11 years ago when this photo was snapped backstage at a WCW show. In a tragedy of monumental proportions, Chris apparently took the life of his wife, Nancy, and their young son, Daniel, before committing suicide.

ECW's favorite vampire woman will no longer be seen at ringside in WWE, as she was released from the company on May 16, along with ECW veteran Sabu. Ariel's Goth image was not supported by WWE since her debut, and, in the end, the company decided to let her go.

new allies as they defend the honor of the formerly independent, extreme ECW against **Elijah Burke** and his New Breed, as longtime rumors are now official that **Sabu** and **Rob Van Dam** are leaving the company. Van Dam competed in his final WWE bout—a stretcher match against **Randy Orton** at One Night Stand—and picked up the win.

The pair of significant WWE/ECW losses began, of course, with WWE's May 16 announcement that both Sabu and **Ariel** were released from the company. While the release of vampire Diva Ariel surprised a lot of fans, the Sabu announcement capped months of rumors that he was having issues with WWE management.

Of course, it is difficult to overshadow the loss of talents such as RVD and Sabu on a brand struggling for good performers. For the past few weeks, however, WWE's Smackdown and Raw brands have been suffering just as much. On the Raw side, after a brutal match against Orton, **Shawn Michaels** underwent much-needed surgery for a knee problem that has been reportedly causing him pain for more than a year.

Flipping channels to the CW Network, Smackdown suffered a somewhat more serious loss when then-champion **The Undertaker** suffered a torn right biceps. He then endured a steel cage match against **Batista**, a subsequent post-match attack by a returning **Mark Henry**, and an impromptu title challenge by **Edge**. Of course, Edge went on to beat Undertaker for the Smackdown World title. 'Taker is not expected to return for six to eight months, but we would not want to be "The Animal," Henry, or Edge when 'Taker makes his comeback. The loss of The Undertaker was not the only blow dealt to the blue brand, either, as **Ken Kennedy** partially tore his triceps tendon and suffered a hematoma, necessitating a break from action for about two months. The news got worse for the injured Kennedy, who was soon thereafter goaded into defending his "Money In The Bank" briefcase—and was subsequently overwhelmed by Edge.

Finally, wwe.com announced that former cruiserweight champion **Gregory Helms** suffered two broken vertebrae in his neck, one of which was pressing against his spinal cord. Helms underwent the knife at the hands of **Dr. Lloyd Youngblood**

"LASHING OUT!"

By Lash LeRoux

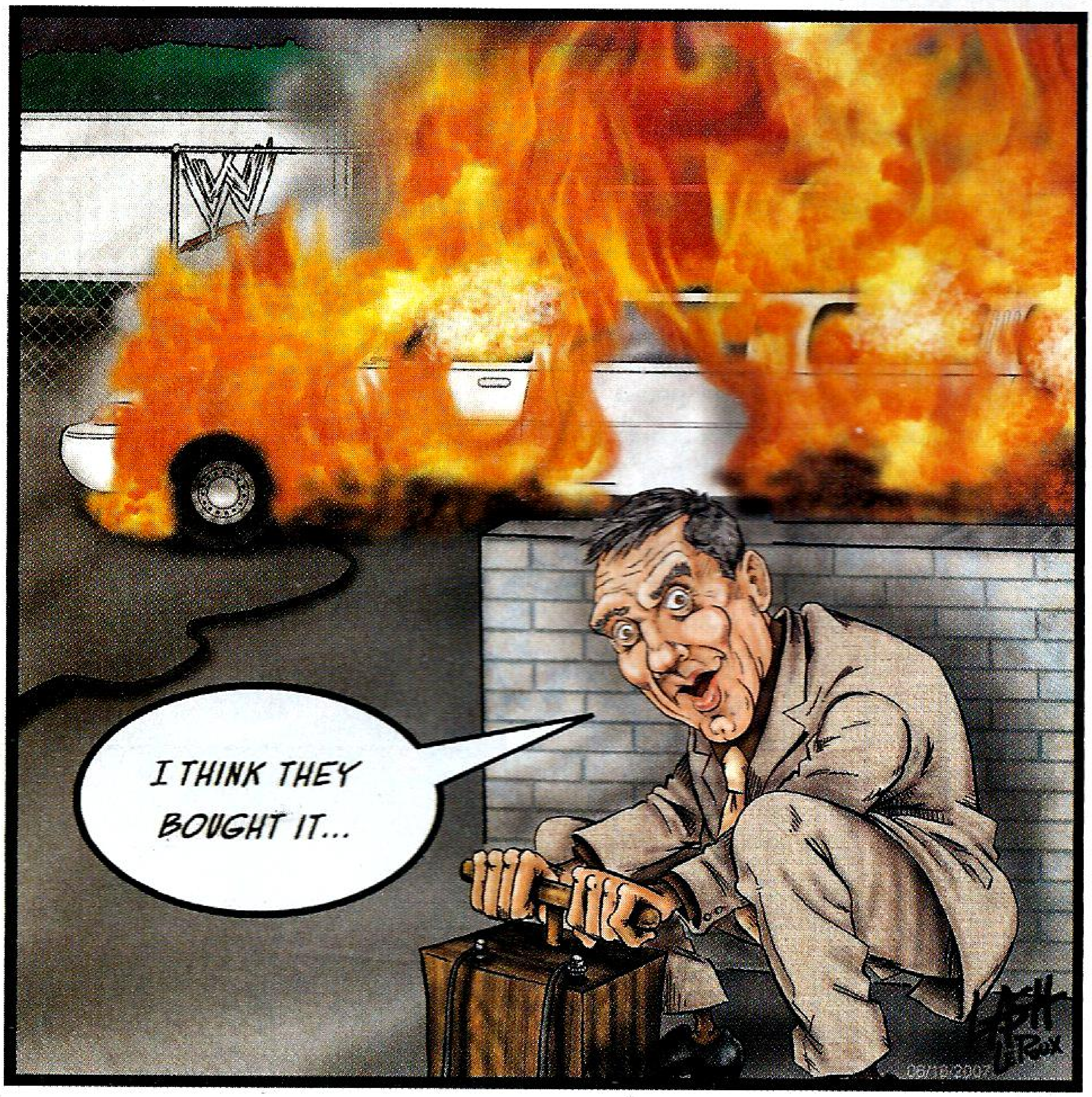


Photo by Tom Casino/Showtime

After countless career changes, Brock Lesnar may have finally found his calling—and one that he might actually have a passion for. Lesnar defeated Min Soo Kim in his debut match for mixed martial arts promotion K-1/Hero in under two minutes.

and is expected to be out of action for about a year. All of us at THE WRESTLER wish the best of luck and a speedy recovery to WWE's entire ailing roster.

John Cena recently found himself engulfed in a spat with TNA star **Ron "The Truth" Killings**. According to reports, the two had a heated stare-down on Memorial Day upon running into one another at the Charlotte-Douglas International Airport. Tension between the two apparently comes from comments Killings made about the Raw World champion in interviews. Cena was headed to Toronto for Raw while Killings was Orlando-bound for *Impact*. Fortunately, neither man missed his flight for a fight.

Speaking of TNA, a planned Slammiversary dream match between TNA World tag team champions **Team 3D** and the reunited **Steiner Brothers** was canceled following throat injury to **Scott Steiner**. Steiner was operated on following a show in San Juan, Puerto Rico, during which he sustained a trachea injury after a kick to the throat by **Apolo** in a tag match.

Rick Steiner chose another tag team legend, **Road Warrior Animal**, as his brother's replacement, but they obviously did not have long enough to prepare, and Team 3D emerged victorious.

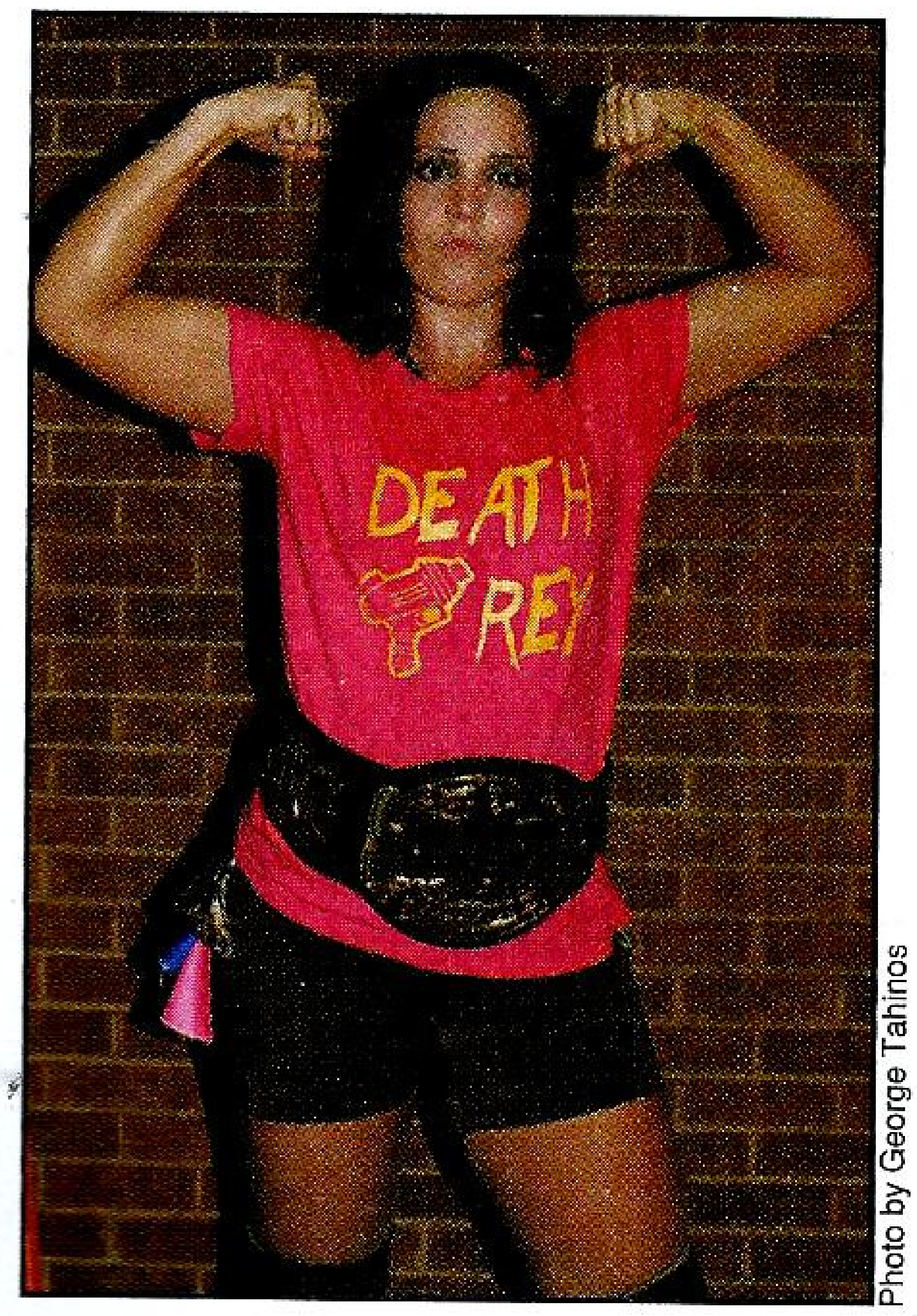


Photo by George Tahinos

It was a good day for women's wrestling when Sara Del Rey outlasted a field of 16 legitimate athletes to be crowned the first SHIMMER champion. And not a drop of pudding or eggnog to be found!

Jumping over to the MMA world, former WWE and IWGP champion **Brock Lesnar** won his debut fight for K-1/Hero's by submission over **Min Soo Kim** in less than two minutes. With the win, Lesnar—who was trained for the fight by MMA fighter **Royce Gracie**—now has to be looking over his shoulder for former WWE colleague **Kurt Angle**. After all, the Olympian has made some rumblings about pursuing some MMA engagements. That would be a can't-miss showdown.

One of Lesnar's former WWE compatriots, **Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson**, announced a separation from his longtime wife, Dany. The pair even issued a joint statement that read, "While certain aspects of our relationship have changed, we are both vitally important to each other's lives. We will continue to advance and manage our business interests, our philanthropic efforts, and, most importantly, the raising of our child together, as a loving team. We've been fortunate enough to spend the last 17 years together as a couple and look forward to spending the rest our lives together as best friends and business partners."

Finally, congratulations go out to **"American Angel" Sara Del Rey**, who was recently crowned the first SHIMMER champion following a two-night, 16-woman single elimination tournament in Berwyn, Illinois. Del Ray went through **Cindy Rogers**, **Alicia**, **"Dark Angel" Sarah Stock**, and **Lacey** to capture the title, which Ring of Honor will allow to be defended on its shows. Could the birth of the SHIMMER title in ROH and the emergence of Del Ray as a legitimate independent star signal a new renaissance for women's wrestling outside of WWE? We here at THE WRESTLER certainly hope so, especially if it helps prevent certain talent in the future from being underutilized in matches involving pudding. In any event, there certainly is a lot going on today in the wrestling world. So stay tuned, as always, for future developments. ☐

krew-cuts

With Frank Krewda

The greatest superstar that never was. Before I get down to business with this month's column, let me issue a qualifier. By time this column reaches the newsstands or your mailbox, this section may be obsolete. That's because there's no telling where Rob Van Dam will land in the next few months. He could very well re-sign with WWE. He could be in TNA. He could be working for a variety of independent federations. He might be wrestling in Japan or Mexico. Or both. Or neither. He could even be out of the sport and at home with his wife, Sonja. The point: This isn't intended to be a post-mortem of RVD's career as much as a lamentation of what his career hasn't become.

Make no mistake, Rob Van Dam is a legitimate wrestling superstar. But he could've been—and should've been—so much bigger than he was in WWF/E, and that might have changed the landscape of sports entertainment for years to come.

No, Van Dam wasn't blessed with the same charisma of Steve Austin, The Rock, or Kurt Angle. But his superior athleticism made him just as marketable. With Van Dam setting the paces at the forefront of the sport, as he did for ECW a decade before, the quality of professional wrestling would've risen dramatically. Unfortunately, Vince McMahon never deemed RVD worthy enough of a sustained push.

Of course, Van Dam, a man who takes his career extremely seriously, might have hurt his cause by popping off in shoot interviews and getting caught with marijuana and Vicodin. But wrestling superstars have been bending and breaking rules for years. Those who put enough asses in seats, as RVD could have if given the chance, are given much more latitude than those who cannot when it comes to bad behavior. In short, Van Dam was special enough to earn special treatment.

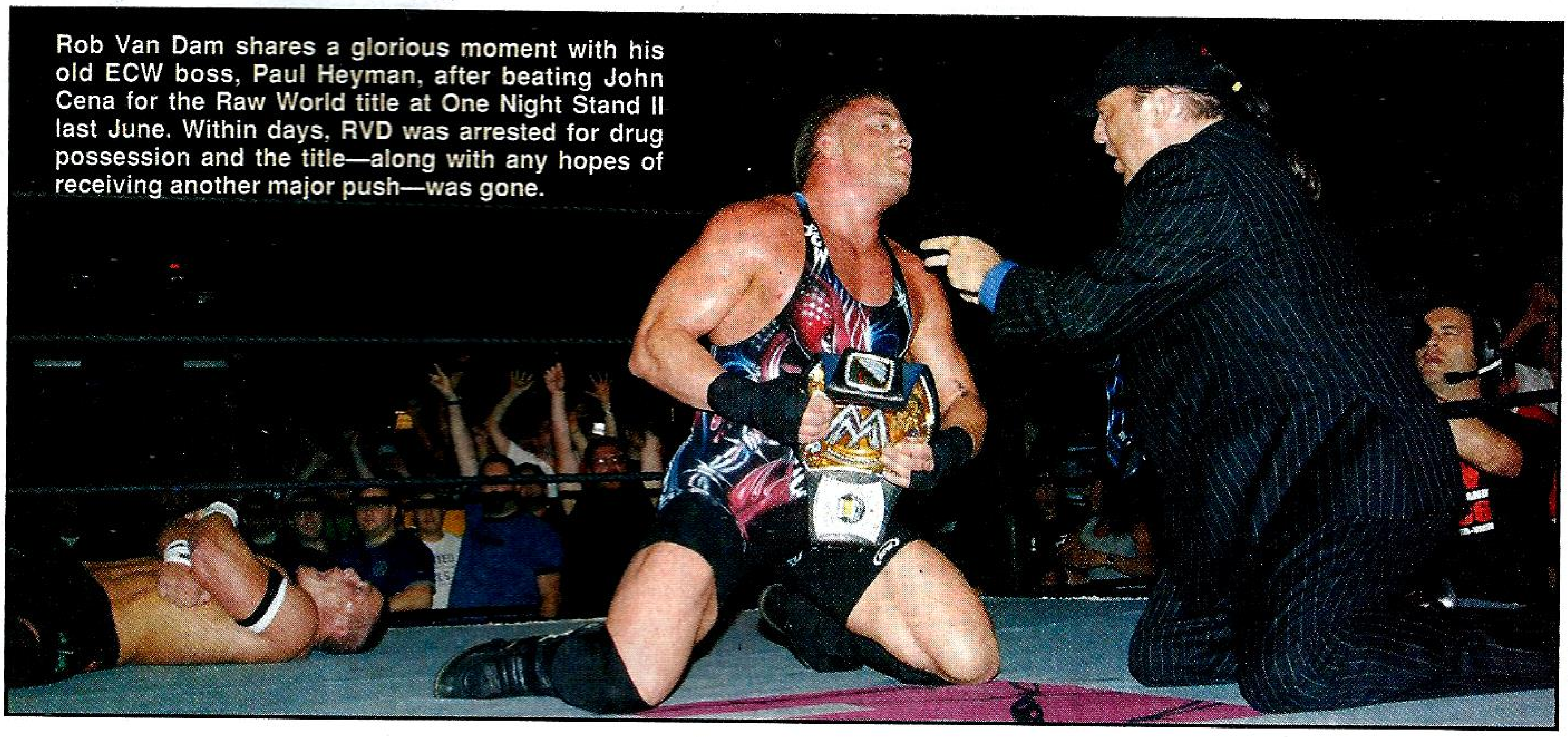
It will most likely be a long time until we find out the truth about why RVD was never given a fair chance to flourish in WWE, and, should he choose to leave McMahon & Co., he'll be added to the list of WWE mismanaged superstars.

Don't look a gift horse in the mouth. I recently read on wwe.com that Trevor Murdoch is none too pleased with the WWE draft concept. "It sucks!" Ol' Trev said.

It seems he was upset at the prospect of being separated from tag team partner Lance Cade just as they're reaching unprecedented exposure and popularity on Raw (aided no doubt by their recent association with The Hardys).

I can understand Murdoch's point, but I think he needs to put in a fresh pinch of Cope and relax. If I were in his trunks, I might be a bit happier at the opportunity to break into the singles ranks.

Cade is a reliable partner and impressive talent, but I think Murdoch has enough charisma, savvy, and toughness to make a major splash in WWE on his own. He's a throwback to an era when taking care of business in the ring meant more than entrance music and cool pyrotechnics.



Rob Van Dam shares a glorious moment with his old ECW boss, Paul Heyman, after beating John Cena for the Raw World title at One Night Stand II last June. Within days, RVD was arrested for drug possession and the title—along with any hopes of receiving another major push—was gone.

Murdoch's reaction seems especially curious considering he was trained by Harley Race, who, despite partnering with Larry "The Ax" Hennig early in his career, reached celestial heights as a singles champ. Perhaps Race should remind his former charge that having the promotion split up Murdoch and Cade is much easier and less bloody than making the eventual turn successful partners often make on each other. WWE is putting Murdoch on an easier path to bigger things; Race needs to make sure Trevor is down it.

Ultimate tough guys. Speaking of the tough-guy throwback types, here are five of the all-time toughest who'd have prospered in this era—or any other era:

5. Dick the Bruiser. The Bruiser may have been limited athletically compared to today's superstars, but his was the ass-stompin', finger-flippin', beer-guzzlin' mold that spawned "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin, who revitalized the industry in the late-'90s with those very same qualities.

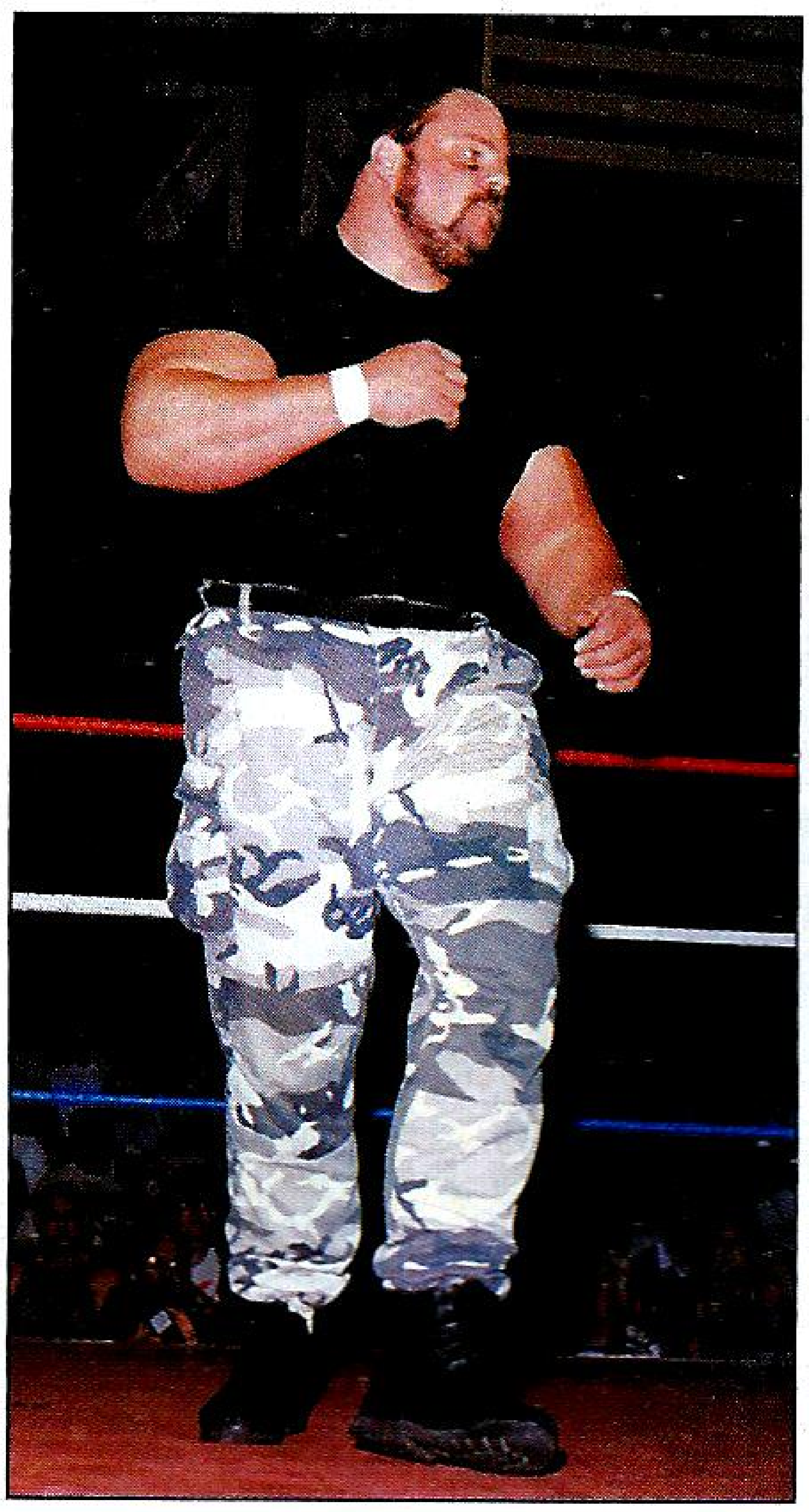
4. Buzz Sawyer. A total maniac inside and outside of the ring, Sawyer also had the goods on the mike. A talker as effective as Sawyer would've been like money in the bank in the Internet era, especially since he could back up his chatter with magnificent matches.

3. Jeep Swenson. With all due respect to "Big Poppa Pump," The Jeep made Scott Steiner's peaks look like goose bumps. Truth be told, Swenson was exactly the type of beefed-up musclehead today's fans tend to rebel against. But as predictable and mundane as he was in the ring, Swenson's physique was freakish enough to command constant attention from even the most demanding fans.

2. Ray Stevens. "The Bomber" was the complete package ... on the mat, in the air, and on the stick. His skills sometimes overshadowed his toughness, which came to the fore in matches against The Sheik, The Destroyer, and a host of other NWA contenders.

1. Bruiser Brody. Few wrestlers projected the ferocity and violence like the late, great Brody, who performed as intensely and dangerously as he looked. Brody had the physique, attitude, and ability to inflict bodily harm on anyone who dare stepped into the ring with him. More importantly, he had the desire and the willingness to do exactly that.

Buzz cuts ... Nice to see "Dr. Death" Steve Williams back on the road and making appearances at some WWE events. As a cigar-smoking tobacco-chewer, I'd be wise to use Williams' brush with throat cancer as motivation to give up these vices. Anyhow, all the best to Williams ... Coming to an airport near you, John Cena vs. Ron Killings III: I don't know how often wrestlers bump into each other at airports, but so far Cena and Killings have done it twice, and both times Internet reports of tension and confrontation ensue. Something tells me that if these two really want a piece of each other, it would've happened by now. □



Six-foot, 400-pound Jeep Swenson makes Frank Krewda's "Ultimate Tough Guys" list. Swenson, who competed in World Class but also had several movie credits, died of heart failure in 1997 at age 40.

DON'T MISS
PWI UPDATE
WITH
FRANK
INGIOSI

EXCLUSIVELY ON:
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Pro Wrestling Illustrated Managing Editor Frank Ingiosi, is insightful, provocative, and downright funny! You've read "The Trade's Mark" in *PWI*. Now check out Frank's column, "The Turn," every Friday afternoon.

Ingiosi On Undertaker vs. Henry: "The Undertaker looked great, hitting spot after spot and manhandling Henry as if he were a sack of potatoes (which, ironically, will rank three spots higher than Henry in this year's *PWI 500*.)"

Ingiosi On Joey Styles' Promo: "Nothing was sacred, as Styles attacked some of the company's ridiculous storylines, as well as the chairman himself. Basically, for one beautiful three-minute span, Styles was the voice of every disgruntled fan."

Ingiosi On WWE Women: "I hope something relatively interesting happens soon, because I'm actually getting tired of this weekly, mind-numbingly repetitive catfight between Mickie James, Ashley, and Trish. It's actually gotten to the point where it bores me both as a wrestling fan *and* as a man. Did I just write that?"

Frank Ingiosi ...
on pwi-online.com!

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on assignment

By Liz Hunter

FOR THOSE OF you expecting Harry Burkett's "Blindsided" column, your eyes are not deceiving you. This is a one-time "On Assignment" special for THE WRESTLER. When Harry mentioned that he was too busy with his other editorial responsibilities to do justice to a column, I told him that I had a burning issue to discuss. And, no, I'm not talking about Vince McMahon turning into human fireworks.

I'd like to discuss what happened earlier on the June 11 edition of Raw: the 2007 talent draft.

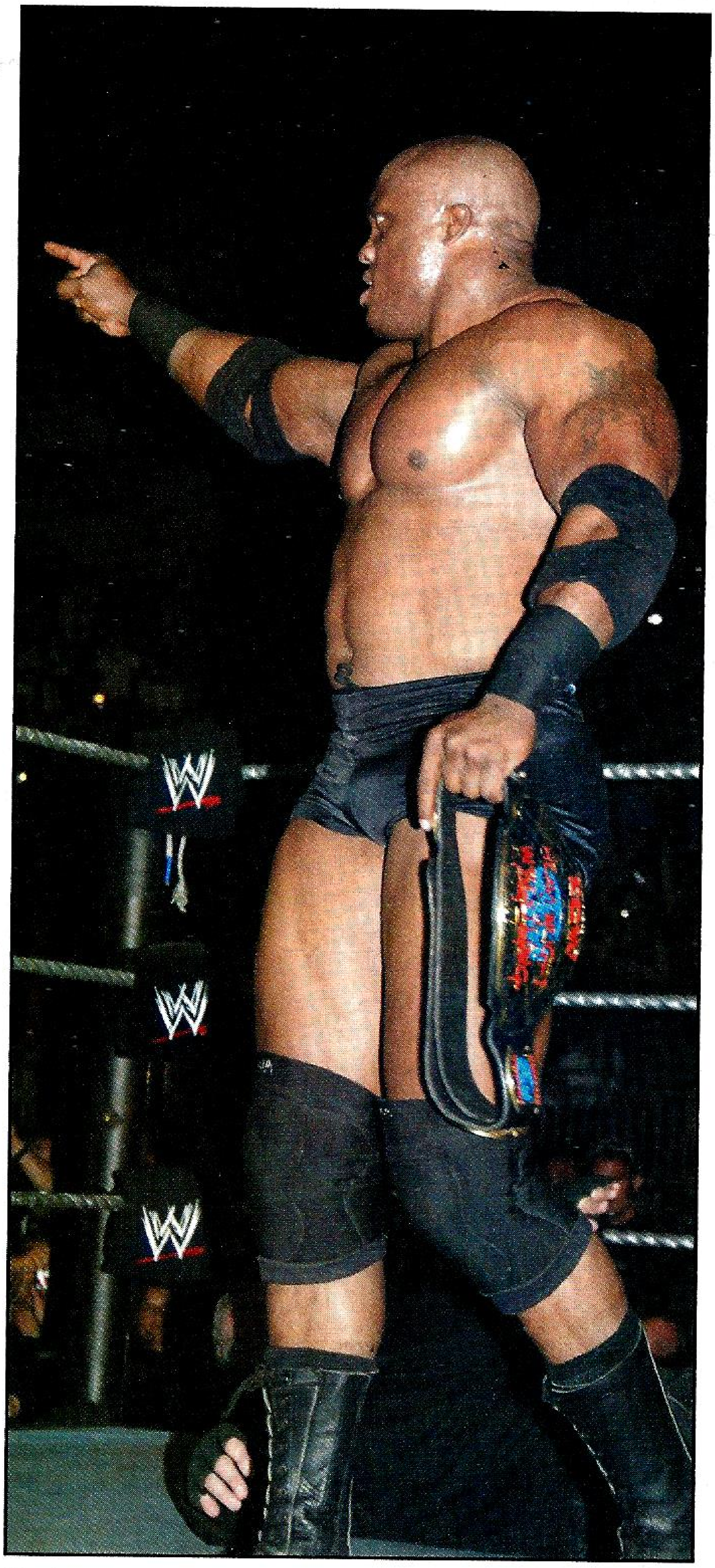
The WWE draft is one of the most important events the company holds. In today's current climate of pro wrestling, it's tough for stars to get past a stale point in their careers. There's no more King of the Ring to help young performers rise up the ladder in one night. There's no more WCW to repackage aging stars that have hit a creative snag. Heck, there isn't even *Velocity* anymore to feature wrestlers who have become lost in the shuffle.

The draft is an opportunity for stars to step forward and alter their travel plans for the next 365 days. Although WWE continued to post draft picks for most of the week following Raw, I wanted to focus on the names that were called up during the three-hour "Vince McMahon Dies" edition of Raw.

The Great Khali: The 7'3" monster was sent to Smackdown in the first random pick of the night. Exciting? Not really. He's been there before. Come to think of it, Khali has been everywhere before. WWE's answer to a wandering nomad, Khali has yet to find a home to call his own. Then again, if he did find a home, he wouldn't call it "home." He'd probably call it, "*Blah! Blah! Bababa!*" It's time to demote Khali to bodyguard status.

The Boogeyman: Get this man some extreme worms. ECW came calling for the face-painted sideshow freak from Smackdown, and it was long overdue. From spitting worms at King Booker's queen to biting off part of Jillian Hall's face, Boogey has made it clear that he marches to the beat of his own insane drummer. To some, the same can be said for Sci Fi's Tuesday night ECDub program. Looks like this one could be a match made in heaven ... or hell.

King Booker: All hail King Bookah! It's about time the five-time WCW champion made his majestic return to Raw. Sure, we all may roll our eyes when the former Harlem Heat member speaks with his pretend British accent and actually seems to think he's a genuine monarch, but that's part of Booker's charm. He has the



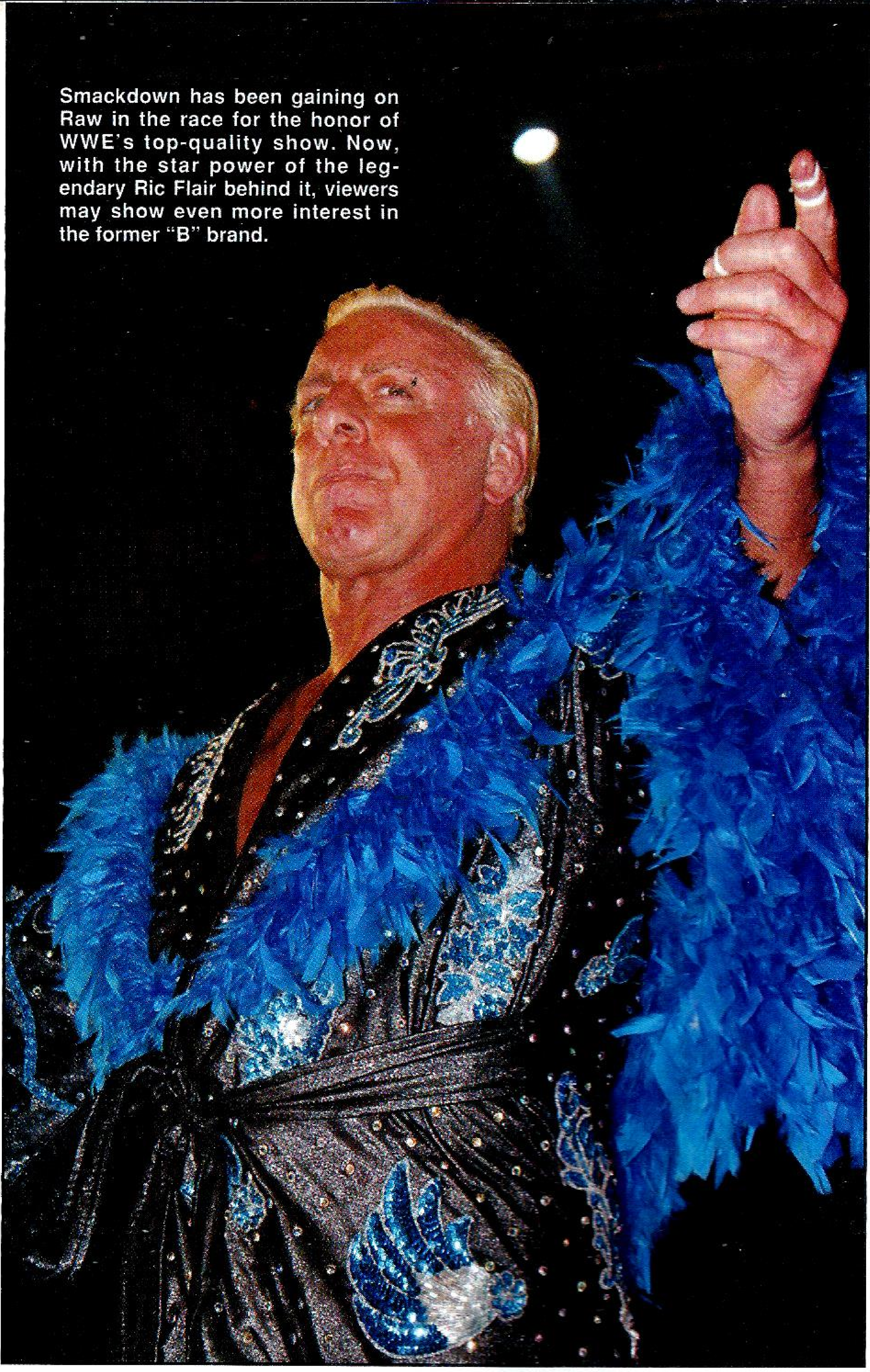
Vince McMahon couldn't prevent Bobby Lashley from getting his hands back on the title at One Night Stand, but V-Mac made sure Lashley didn't keep it with his move to the Raw brand.

ability to reinvent himself over and over. If the whole British act gets tired, it wouldn't take much for "The Book" to break out that spinnarooni and force us all to cheer him again.

Chris Benoit: Unlike many fans, my first look at Benoit occurred during his NWA World tag team title tournament appearance in 1993. "The Crippler" teamed with Beef Wellington and immediately made an impact. By the time Chris made it to the original ECW, he was already building up a cult following. Returning to the place that really put him on the map might not only have proved beneficial to his own future, but also to the future of the brand.

Torrie Wilson: Torrie was sent to Smackdown in what was one of the least exciting drafts of the night. At least she can finally distance herself from Carlito. Other than that, there's not much to analyze with this one. Another Diva. Another night of the week.

Chris Masters: Like many others, I was tired of seeing "The Masterpiece" try to full-nelson the Raw roster each week. It got old and, given how close he was to becoming a main-eventer a few years ago, Masters has knocked his career into neutral. His constant matches against Santino Marella and Super Crazy screamed out that he needed a change of scenery. Masters on Smackdown could be what this kid has needed all along.



Smackdown has been gaining on Raw in the race for the honor of WWE's top-quality show. Now, with the star power of the legendary Ric Flair behind it, viewers may show even more interest in the former "B" brand.

Bobby Lashley: The ECW champion was sent to Raw and then quickly stripped of his title by Vince McMahon (in his last official act before ... *kablooey!*) It raises some questions, though. If all it took was a jump to Raw in order to get the title off of Lashley, why didn't McMahon just send him there months ago? He would have saved himself a lot of pain. Either way, Bobby goes to Mondays, and it only makes sense. He practically lives there anyway.

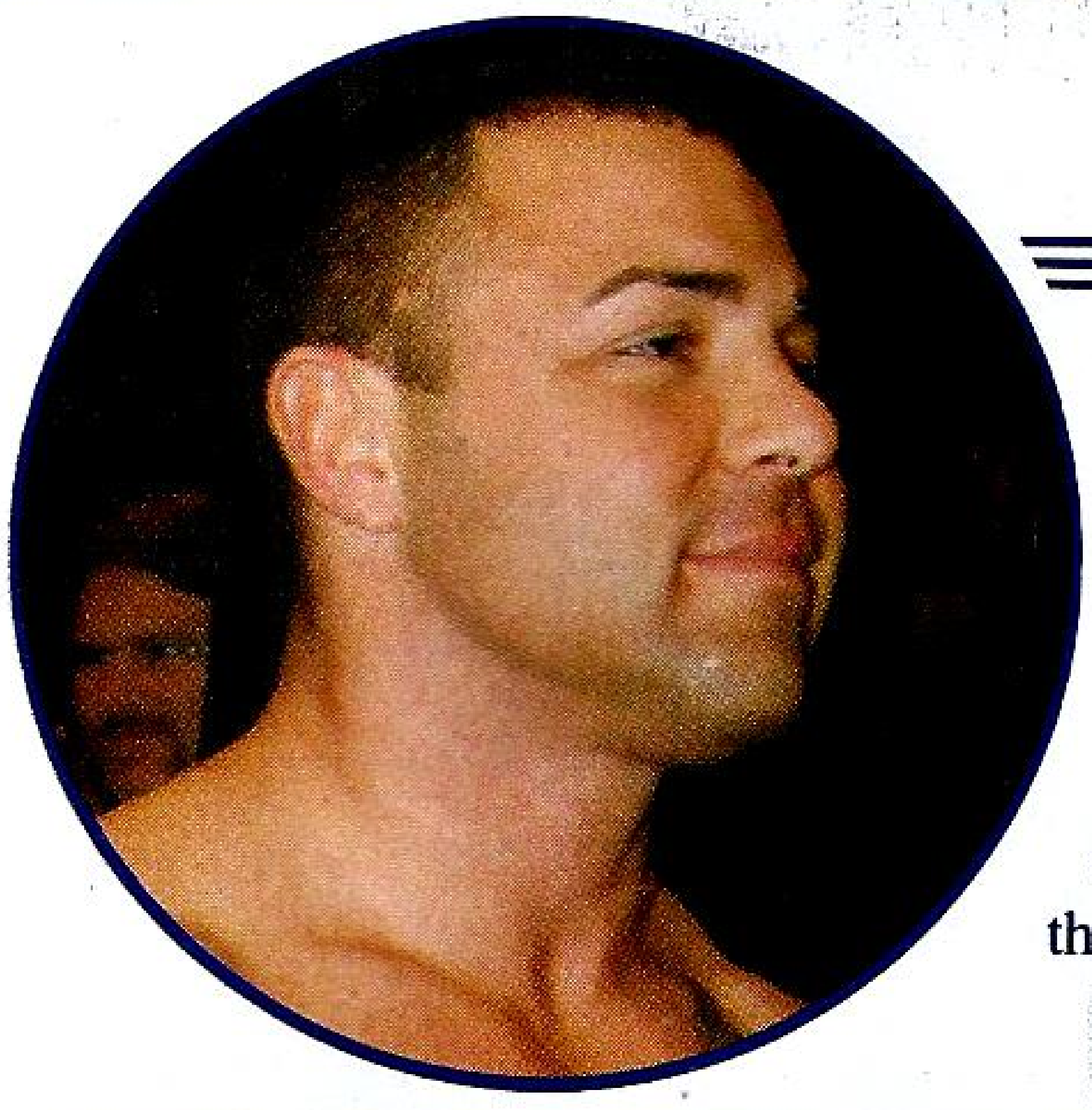
Ric Flair: *Whoooo!* "Naitch" has needed a new lease on his career ever since he left Evolution. Although he's mentored Carlito and battled The Spirit Squad, "Slick Ric" hasn't yet settled into the next stage of his career. With Flair moving to Smackdown, this looks like the move that can finally make that happen.

Gene Snitsky: Raw welcomed back Gene as the second-to-last draft of the night. In what was definitely the most meaningless switch of the night, Snitsky went back to the brand that couldn't find a use for him the first time around. From losing on *Heat* to winning in ECW, the "Baby Killer" looked like he was on his way up. Now he's back to where it all began. Fun while it lasted, *eh* "Snitty"?

Ken Kennedy: Despite his embarrassing "Money In The Bank" loss to Edge, Ken Kennedy is WWE's real future prospect. The loud and boisterous Smackdown star was sent to Raw, and those in attendance couldn't be happier. With so many SD stars falling to the rising star, Ken has amassed a huge amount of experience in a short time. By bringing all that to Mondays, Mr. K could be the man who finally dethrones John Cena ...

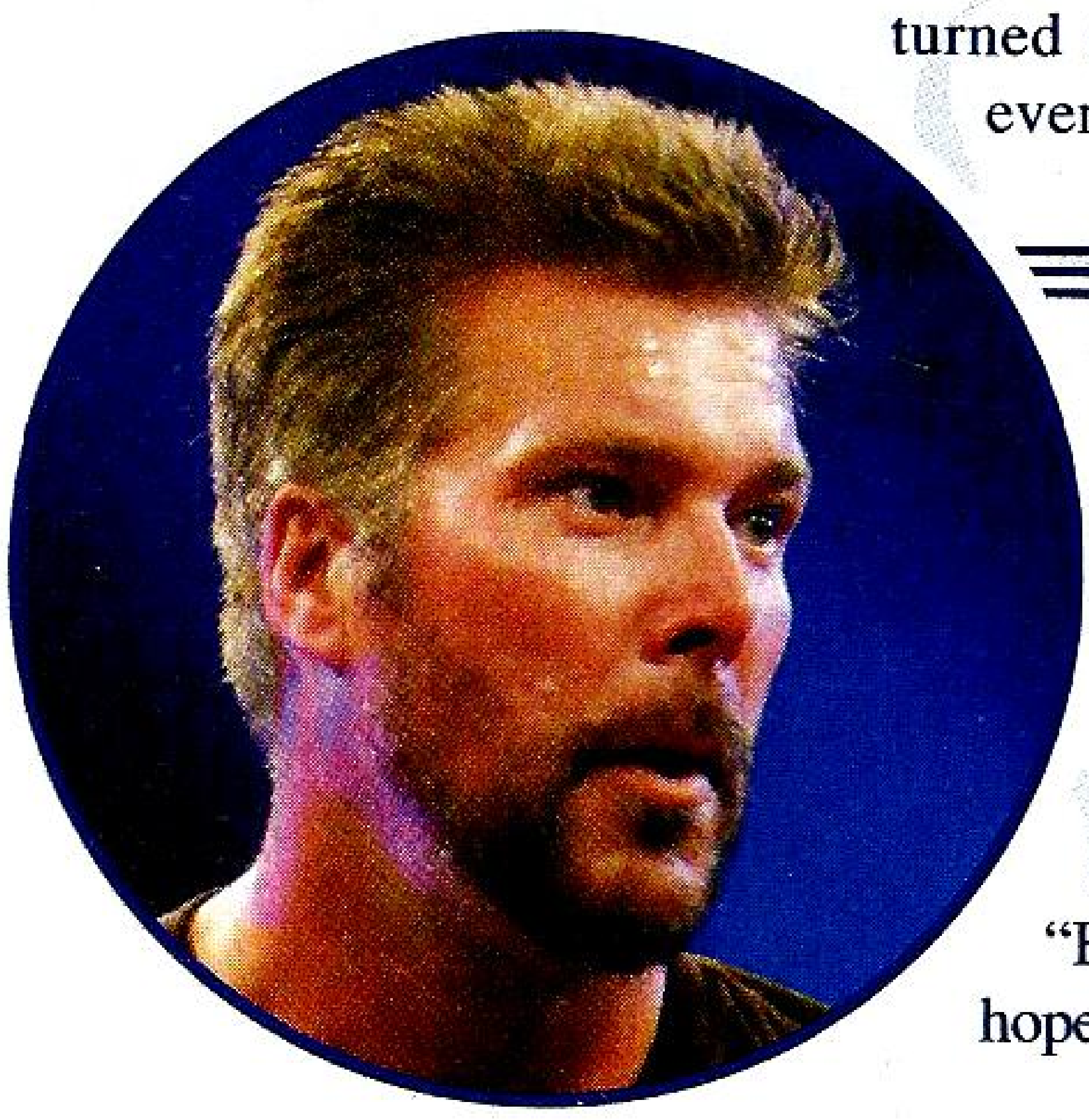
... well, until Triple-H comes back, that is. ☐

thumbs up



Thumbs Up to Santino Marella. Imagine this: You've spent the better portion of your adult life trying to get your big break in the wrestling business until one night, in your hometown, you're pulled out of the crowd by Vince McMahon and walk out of the ring as the Intercontinental champion. Impossible, right? Not if you're Santino Marella. Marella did more than upset Umaga; he went on to join the Raw roster and legitimized his championship by defeating Chris Masters in a series of bouts. Marella's future is limitless; we can only hope that sudden success will not go to his head.

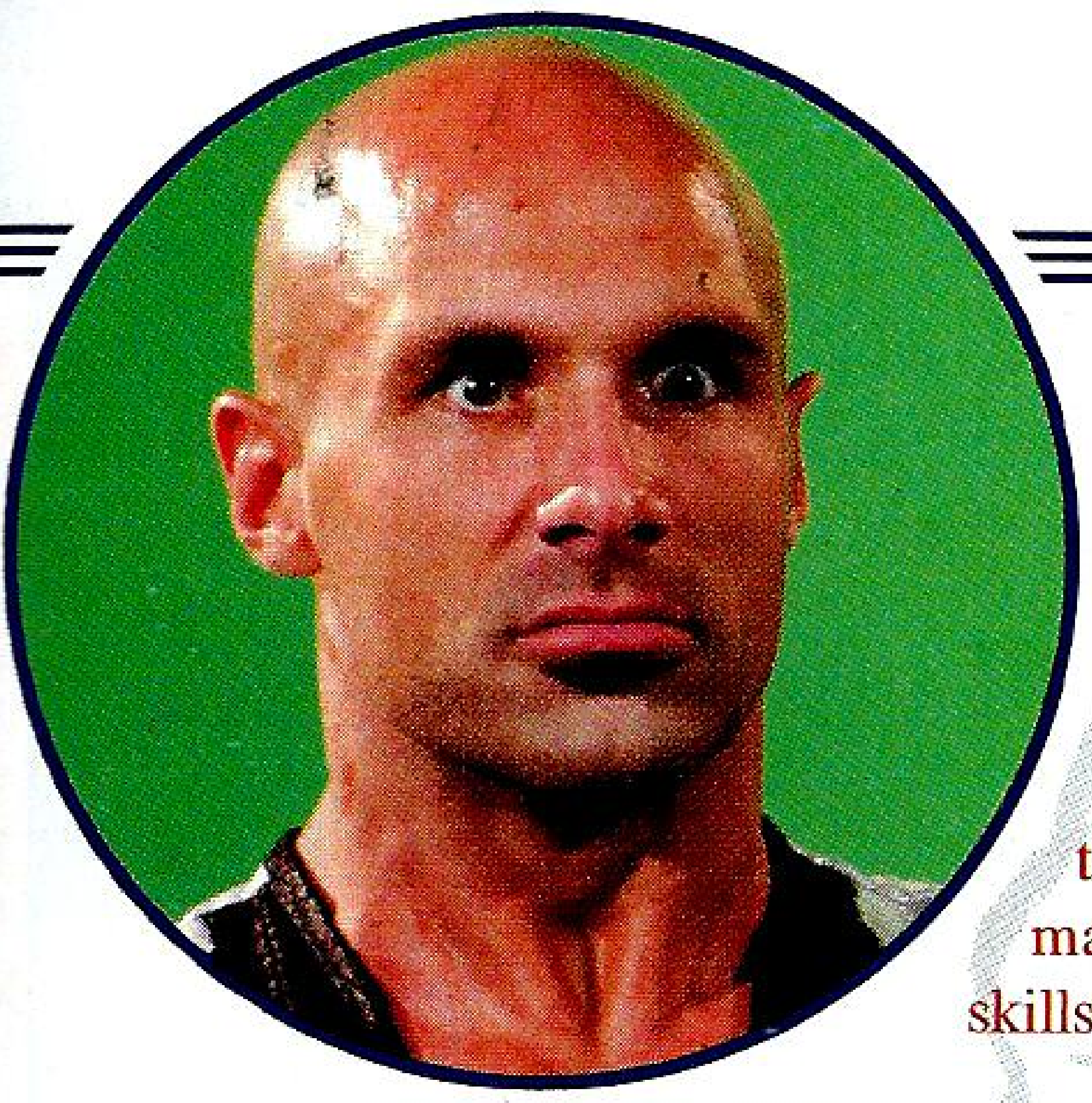
Thumbs Up to MVP. He's flashy, loves himself way too much, and insults nearly every fan willing to give him a second chance, but Montel Vontavious Porter is living proof of the power of persistence. MVP chased then-U.S. champion Chris Benoit from event to event in the hopes of prying the gold away from the "Rabid Wolverine." After months of near-falls and some truly exciting matches, Porter finally captured his first WWE singles title. The fans aren't throwing any parties, and his fellow wrestlers are still turned off by his arrogance, but MVP has earned everybody's grudging respect.



Thumbs Up to Kevin Nash. Nash has become a surprising ally of the X division stars he once degraded to the point of near extinction. Nash swore, almost comically, that he would take over the X division and impart his image on the entire lot. While critics believed that would lead to an increase in faux-leather ring attire and weekly debilitating injuries, the results have been just the opposite. X division matches have been as exciting as ever, yet now with an edgy, clever attitude. Without Nash, we wouldn't have "Black Machismo" Lethal, the "new" Sonjay Dutt, and the hope of more exciting characters to come.

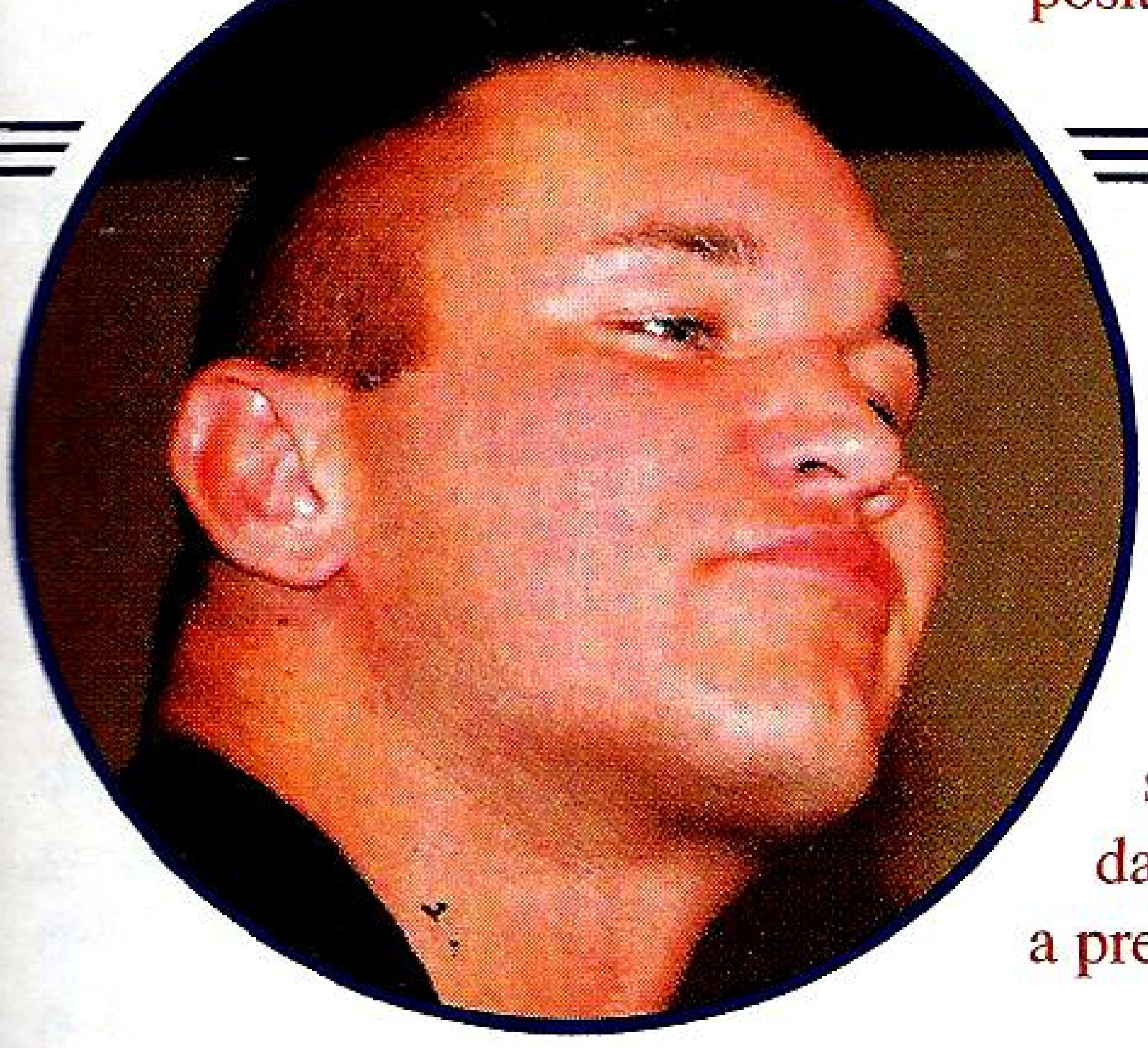
Thumbs Up to Candice Michelle. Michelle is so good at looking good, she could have taken the easy route. But Candice also has a lot of pride. She decided she wanted to become a real wrestler, and worked her butt off to make it happen. While she's still years away from reaching Trish Stratus or even Mickie James-like status, Michelle has truly stepped up as a viable contender to the women's title. It would help her cause if she could get over the trauma of having suffered a broken nose, as opponents are starting to exploit her fear of having it re-injured.

thumbs down



Thumbs Down to Christopher Daniels. For whatever reason, Daniels feels compelled to distinguish himself from the identity he forged as the gifted high-flyer who mesmerized fans while part of the X division, stole the show in nearly every TNA match in which he participated, and teamed with A.J. Styles to capture the NWA World tag team title. Okay, he's chosen the rulebreaking route. Half the wrestlers in the history of this business have done the same. But how many of those people can claim to have Daniels' skills? Reconsider, Chris, you're too good for this.

Thumbs Down to Bobby Lashley. It's really difficult to hang the yoke of a "Thumbs Down" on Lashley. It's perhaps unfair to hold Bobby responsible for losing the ECW title to the combination of Vince McMahon, Shane McMahon, and Umaga. If you put Lashley and any of the three together in a fair match, there is little doubt who would win. But even though Lashley overcame the numbers to regain the belt, that blot on his record will be there forever. He should have been smarter than to allow himself to be placed in a position where he and the belt were left exposed.



Thumbs Down to Randy Orton. What's gotten into Orton? Killing the legend of a wrestler is one thing; vicious and unrelenting attacks that could lead to permanent injury, well, that's just sick. First it was Shawn Michaels, then Rob Van Dam. Orton has clearly crossed the line that separates aggressive wrestling from the desire to permanently injure. Perhaps feeling as if he was being unfairly shunned from the Raw World title chase, Orton has apparently tapped into a very dark, scary place in his psyche. From where we sit, it's a pretty ugly sight.

Thumbs Down to Teddy Long. Long conducted a "thorough" search for an assistant Smackdown GM when he came to the conclusion that he'd prefer to spend more time with his girlfriend, Kristal Marshall. With a gentle amount of coaxing from Kristal, Long made a highly questionable choice in Vickie Guerrero. Even though Vickie swears she has changed her ways, how can Long—or anyone else—trust her? For a guy like Long, who has been around the sport for over two decades, this is quite a shocker. When Kristal dumps him (which is inevitable) and he still has Vickie around, he's going to be very sorry.

point:

KURT ANGLE SHOULD PARTICIPATE IN MMA

By Lisa Rocchi

BEFORE ANYONE advises against Kurt Angle participating in mixed martial arts events, it should be kept in mind that one-on-one combat is the fuel that makes his engine run.

Given his Olympic accomplishments, his competitive nature, and the all the good he can do for the image of professional wrestling by defeating shootfighters, there's really no reason Angle shouldn't compete in MMA.

Photo by Tom Casino/Showtime

There has been an expressed interest by Kurt Angle and TNA concerning the possibility of Angle competing in mixed martial arts. It certainly worked out for Brock Lesnar in his debut for K-1. THE WRESTLER Managing Editor Lisa Rocchi thinks Angle can raise the status of all pro wrestlers.

I can almost hear the arguments against my point before they're even made: MMA is the real deal, no choreography, all-out warfare, blah, blah, blah. Like Brock Lesnar, who recently made a successful MMA debut, Angle has the experience, the make-up, and the technical expertise not only to survive, but also to thrive in MMA competition.

Plus, he really has nothing left to accomplish in professional wrestling. Let's face it: Kurt Angle has risen to the top of WWE. He's the TNA World champion. He's been the darling of the fans as well as their greatest scourge. And that's just in the ring.

Over the years, he's been a masterful performer—intense, believable, ominous, and hilarious. There are no other ways to package Kurt Angle in professional wrestling.

Now it's time to let Angle be himself—a skilled warrior who can draw upon that vast reserve of talent and savvy to make a dent in his natural sport.

Angle would not be the only one to benefit from the venture. Professional wrestling as a whole would gain credibility by having one of its spawn step right in and take it to MMA fighters.

Right now, the general public looks upon professional wrestlers as shootfighters' stunt doubles. But Angle (and Lesnar, too) could change that perception almost immediately by tearing it up in MMA. By proving his mettle in the octagon, Angle could single-handedly prove to the world that professional wrestlers are serious athletes who shouldn't be laughed off.

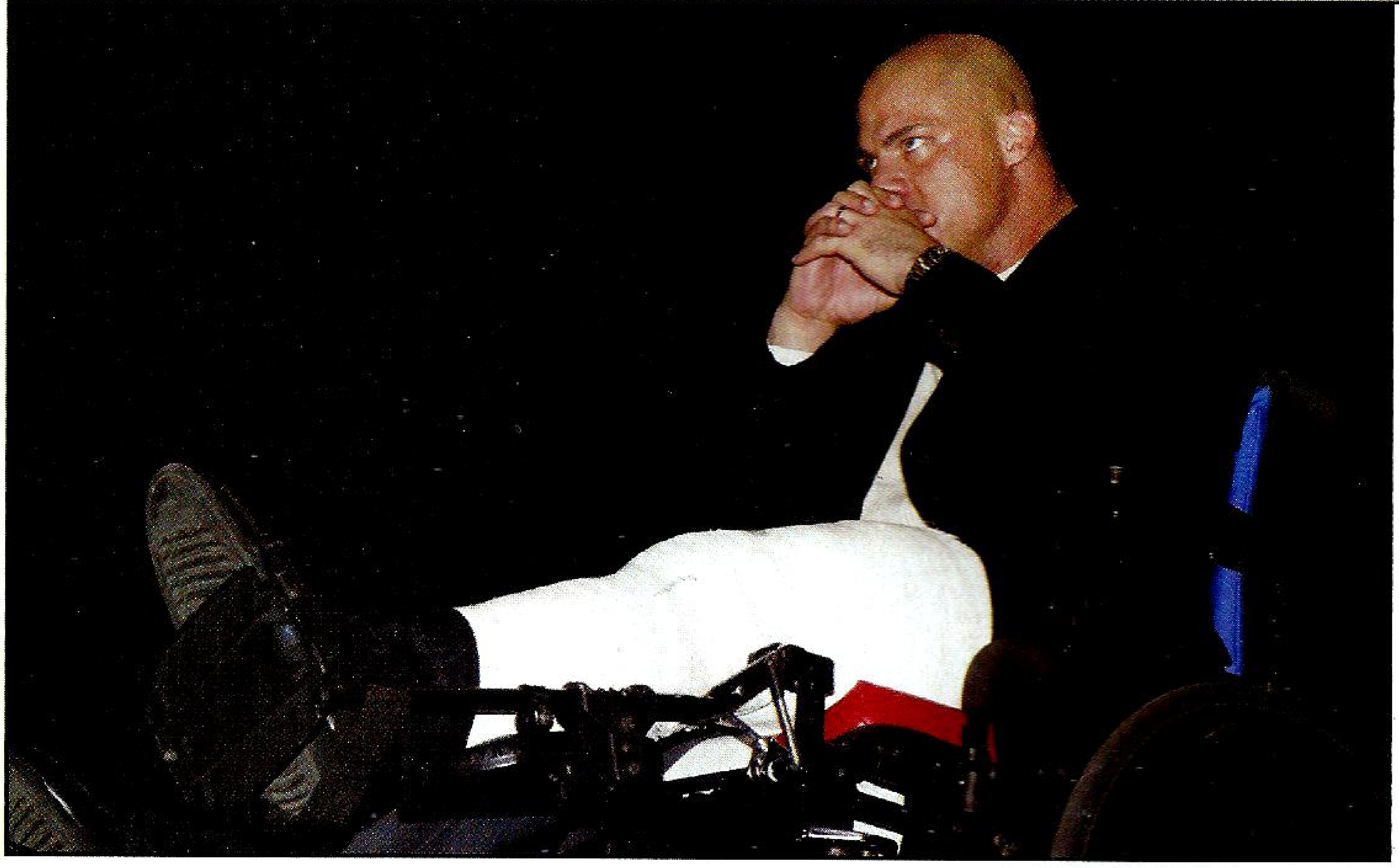
Angle's inclusion would also be a boon to MMA as well. His ability to enthrall fans, both positively and negatively, has long been established at live events, on TV, and pay-per-view, and his credentials as a "legitimate" wrestler are as solid as they come. He clearly has a distinct advantage over the backyard brawlers who shack up in a studio for 13 weeks and slug it out for a shot at the "big show." Even the wildly popular UFC could use a bona fide bad ass in its ranks.

Finally, after years of faithful—and injury laden—service to the wrestling industry, Kurt Angle has earned the right to now pursue a career that suits his abilities, his desires, and his will to compete. I say Angle should make the plunge for his own good and the good of professional wrestling.

Lisa Rocchi is the managing editor of **THE WRESTLER.**

counterpoint:

KURT ANGLE SHOULD NOT PARTICIPATE IN MMA



Kurt Angle should be cautious, according to Senior Writer Frank Krewda, considering the Olympian's history of injuries. Had he tested the waters of MMA several years back, he may had a better chance for success.

Photo by Tom Casino/Showtime

By Frank Krewda

NO DOUBT, Kurt Angle has the will and experience to make a big impact in MMA. Unfortunately, though, he also has the scars, bumps, bruises, and compromised joints and muscles that only a career in professional wrestling can bestow upon the human anatomy.

Ratchet up the speed, intensity, and risk of hand-to-hand combat, and it's hard to predict anything but pain and failure for Angle in MMA.

At one time, maybe seven years ago, crossing over to shootfighting would've made sense for Angle. But with all the serious injuries he has suffered—especially the broken neck—the venture simply becomes too risky.

If the rigors of sports entertainment were enough to force Angle to the sidelines, how well can his fans expect him to endure the demands of a much more physical and unforgiving sport like MMA? For all his will and intensity, I'm not so sure Angle has enough left to survive MMA, much less thrive.

True, Angle has enough charisma to connect with MMA fans, and plenty of "character" in him to successfully market himself. And you can't deny his credentials—an Olympic gold medal for one. But there's much less room for those attributes in MMA than in professional wrestling. In other words, Kurt can talk a good game, but if he doesn't back up his words in the octagon, then he becomes just another "rassler" who can't hang with the "real" athletes, a scene that's repeated itself several times in Japan.

That, of course, would erode the image of professional wrestling, not enhance it. Besides, regardless of what Angle would do in MMA, he's not likely to win over converts to professional wrestling. Critics have their reasons for not following pro wrestling, most of which I'd suspect have nothing to do with Kurt Angle.

Finally, the only thing Angle has earned as a professional wrestler is lots of money. Every person who gets into the industry understands the rules: You get tremendous earning potential if you're good at your job. You give your time, blood, sweat, and tears without receiving a pension, retirement fund, or health benefits. Nobody can claim that Angle hasn't given his mind, body, and soul to the wrestling industry, but so have hundreds of others before him—and for much less pay.

Brock Lesnar had an excellent showing against Min Soo Kim in his MMA debut. If Lesnar's convincing victory reflects upon the wrestling industry in a positive way, that's great. Let's just be happy with Lesnar's contributions. Other than the personal glory of perhaps winning another title, I can see no reason for Angle to even consider competing in MMA events.

***Frank Krewda is a senior writer for* THE WRESTLER.**

introducing:

By Brady Hicks

EDDIE KINGSTON

You don't want to get on Eddie Kingston's bad side. Chris Hero did and Kingston has made him pay dearly throughout their long-running feud. Life as a wrestler is a constant battle, but Kingston knows it's all just part of the business—and he loves the business

TO SAY THAT former Combat Zone Wrestling champion Eddie Kingston is an angry individual would be a massive understatement. In fact, Kingston, the 6'2", 245-pounder is a self-described "miserable man." Whether in the ring with rivals like Chris Hero or running around in his spare time with his Blackout cronies, Kingston is exactly what he claims: "I've got an attitude, but I am pretty much what I say I am. What you see is always what you get with me, just turned up about a thousand degrees."

Things were not always that way for the 25-year-old veteran of CZW, CHIKARA, IWA Mid-South, and Ring of Honor. Kingston was trained to wrestle by Mike Quackenbush. It was not until an early stint in CHIKARA with his Wild Cards tag partner, "Black" Jack Marciano, that a young Kingston met Hero for the first time. "Chris took a liking to Jack and me, and I guess you could say it soon became a friendship," said Kingston. "Before long, though, he showed his true colors. He started to treat us less like friends and more like trainees. He turned on us and started treating us like his whipping boys. Then Jack had to leave wrestling because his knee was messed up, and it was just me. Jack was gone, but I decided to stay and fight back."

Kingston chooses not to disclose the official cause of the rift between he and Hero. "We just don't like each other," Kingston said, "and I know it comes across in our matches. We've had some of the hardest-hitting matches you can imagine."

In fact, Kingston lists one particular match with his bitter rival as among the most prominent in his nearly five years

Eddie Kingston suplexes Chris Hero at a January 2006 CZW show. The cause of the rift between the former friends is unknown, but it's very intense and there is no end in sight.

of wrestling. After all, it was at CZW's "Down With The Sickness 2," a memorial show honoring the late Chris Cash, that Kingston defeated Hero to win his first CZW championship. "I can remember feeling like I wasn't getting a lot of respect in the CZW locker room when I first came in," said Kingston. "I know they didn't owe me anything; I wasn't one of their guys. But it did really motivate me to prove to them I deserved to be there.

"Hey, look," he added, "it took you guys five years to realize I existed!"

Kingston's time in CZW also saw him align with Blackout, a stable established in CZW in 2004 by Ruckus, Sabian, and Robbie Minero. Kingston was initially brought in to replace Joker, who had left to fight in Iraq. "It was a great experience. I am in love with being part of the group," said Kingston. "I think a lot of what brought us together was that it was more like friends hanging out. We would do things together in our spare time, and frequently call each other to check in or before a big match."

Unfortunately for Kingston, his time spent in CZW was not all about hanging out with his buds. Kingston lost his CZW championship to Justice Pain—at "Cage Of Death VIII"—in a brutal match in which Pain and an interfering Hero flipped him up and he landed awkwardly on his ankle. "As I was coming down, I overcompensated," said Kingston. "I knew I was injured but I had no idea how badly. I got up, threw a couple forearms, and my ankle just gave out. It just snapped again."

The former champ had broken his ankle in three different places at the hands of the man he hates most. Sixteen screws, a plate, and, most importantly, a broken heart are the memories Kingston has of his title loss. "Wrestling is like therapy to me," he said, "so not having it, plus a lot of the personal problems I was having, made this the worst period in my life. To this day, the ankle swells and it aches. The way I look at it, though, it's all part of the sport. It's just business."

A business that consumes Kingston's life.

While many of his peers dream about someday scoring that big WWE, TNA, or even ROH contract, Kingston is glancing somewhat farther east with his aspirations. A fan of All Japan, New Japan, and Japanese wrestling in general, Kingston's ultimate dream would be to travel overseas and take on Masa Chono. In fact, Kingston was distracted during this entire interview watching his *Best Of Kobashi vs. Kawada* tape.

Kingston models himself after Chono. In terms of character development, however, Kingston is an Eddie Gilbert man all the way. "Eddie was so hated, yet always so respected," said Kingston of the wrestler who died in 1995 at age 33. "He always seemed to have the people in the palm of his hand. I have tapes in which he fought guys like Jerry Lawler and Tommy Rich. He just blew my mind and confirmed for me that this is exactly what I wanted to do.

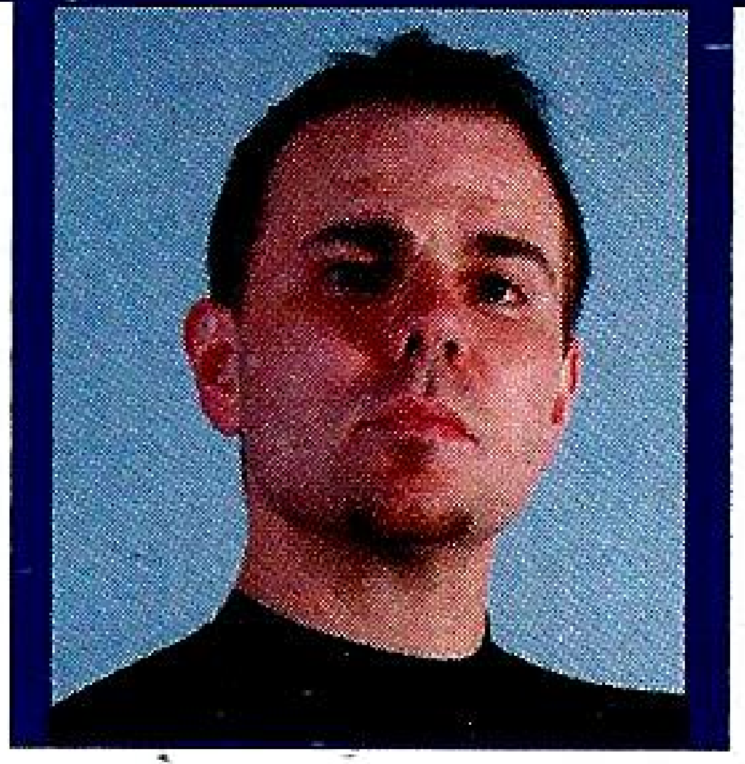
"I will never get to be in the ring with Eddie Gilbert, unfortunately. And I may never get to share a match with Masa Chono. But at least I got to be in the ring with the legend that is Samoa Joe."

Kingston's match with Joe took place on a Fight Sports Midwest card and was, to date, a personal career highlight. It was also the reason why Kingston rushed back from his broken ankle in only three months. "I can't even begin to express how much of an honor it was to share the ring with Joe, a man I've studied for years," said Kingston. "The match went well, even though he whooped me good."

Kingston left the match as sore as he's ever been, but this is a man who seldom has regrets. "Let's just say everything I do in this business is a learning experience," he said. "Sometimes those lessons come very painfully." □

from bell to bell

By Mike Quackenbush



[Editor's note: Mike Quackenbush is a wrestler, promoter, and instructor who has been chronicling his life in the business for The Wrestler *since 1998. In this issue, he writes about his breakthrough match, a victory over Tiger Mask IV for the NWA junior heavyweight title.]*

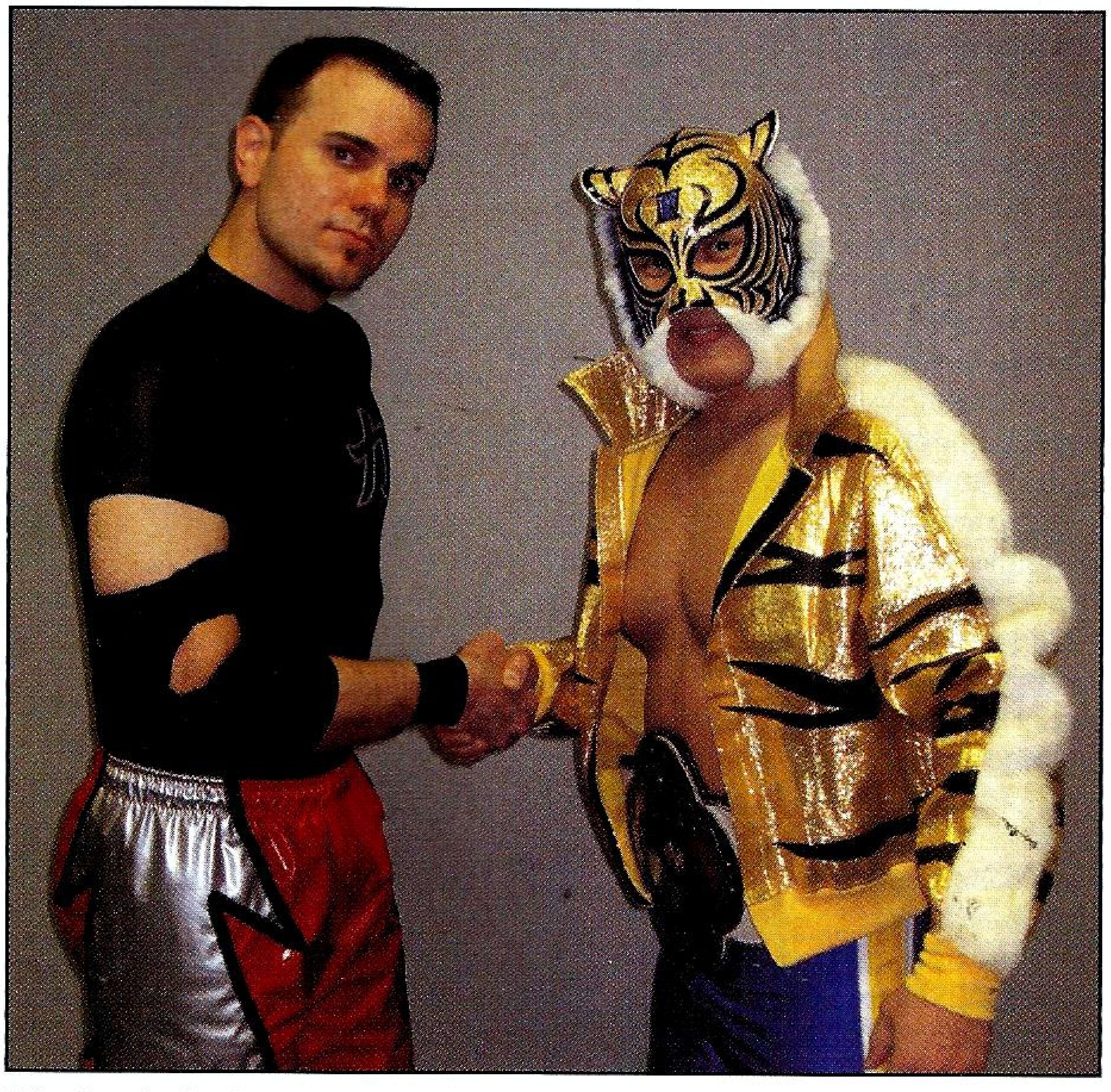
FROM THE FIRST day I stepped between the ropes, I did so with the goal of one day winning the attention and respect of Japanese wrestling fans. When I first started branching out on the East Coast independent scene about 10 years back, my mentor, Ace Darling, advised me that, to accomplish my goal, I needed a full understanding of just what the knowledgeable Japanese fans appreciated and that I couldn't find a better practical example than the bouts between Dynamite Kid and the original Tiger Mask, Satoru Sayama.

Although the majority of the matches I found took place in 1982, they were not just light years ahead of their time, but also years ahead of the American independent scene in the late-1990s, when I first saw these classic encounters. From that moment on, I was infatuated with all things Tiger Mask.

You can imagine then the surreal sensation I experienced in May when I stood in the ring and turned my eyes back down the aisle to see Tiger Mask coming toward me. Of course, this wasn't the crowded pathway of Korakuen Hall with people tossing bouquets of flowers, it was actually a modest ice rink just outside of Chicago. I would not face the original Tiger Mask (long since entered into semi-retirement) that night, but his protégé, Tiger Mask IV, arguably the most rounded of the four athletes to don that famous mask.

New Japan Pro Wrestling, home to Tiger Masks I, III, and IV (Tiger Mask II wrestled for All Japan Pro Wrestling in the mid-1980s), has been fairly synonymous with the character for the past three decades. Prior to Tiger Mask's explosion on the puroresu scene, the character was popularized in comic books and later a cartoon series. Since Tiger Mask's 1981 debut, the character has had a long legacy not just in Japan, but in Mexico, Europe, and the U.S. as well, thanks to scattered appearances by the various Tiger Masks over the years. Tiger Mask IV's spring tour of the U.S. marked his first visit here in almost a decade.

Having followed the tale of Tiger Mask for years, and becoming a student of the character, it was with



Mike Quackenbush exchanges pleasantries with Tiger Mask IV before their match in Indiana. Shockingly, after the match, the belt was around the waist of our columnist. Even if Tiger Mask can shake off the loss and reclaim the title, the memory of this singular accomplishment will remain with Quackenbush for the rest of his life.

mixed feelings that I accepted the invitation from Fight Sports Midwest matchmakers to face Tiger Mask IV during the aforementioned visit. It would certainly be thrilling to match holds with such a legendary character, and yet, it would also prove incredibly daunting to oppose the man carrying the legacy of Tiger Mask, chosen for this most exclusive of roles because of his flawless technique and incredible skill. Not that the idea of declining the match ever crossed my mind, especially not when I was informed that the bout would be for his NWA junior heavyweight title, a belt that had been around the waist of my other puroresu idols, Jushin Liger, Ultimo Dragon, and The Great Sasuke.

The experience of looking across the ring and seeing Tiger Mask was not unlike the experience I had some seven years ago, when facing El Hijo del Santo, another iconic character in the world of pro wrestling. I found myself in a position that I had previously only known through the wonder of video. Instead of Dynamite Kid or Black Tiger jockeying for position opposite a man in a tiger-striped mask, it was me keeping an eye out for Tiger Mask's solebutt kick, which always seems to find its mark on inattentive foes.

Wrestling for the NWA junior heavyweight title meant more than just a chance to lock horns with a puroresu legend, it also meant that for the first time in my career I had a real opportunity to make a name for myself among Japanese fans. None of the dozens of Japanese stars I have faced in the past could boast of the same star-power as Tiger Mask IV. Since the day Jushin Liger's WCW appearances inspired me to become a wrestler, I have always longed for a chance to compete in the Land of the Rising Sun. Taking Tiger Mask to the limit, maybe showing him up a bit in the ring, would be enough to put me on the map.

In the weeks leading up to our singles match, though, the idea that I might beat him rarely crossed my mind. Simply put, when all the factors were considered, it was highly unlikely that a win over Tiger Mask was in my future.

Photo by Buddy Lamentia

Quackenbush applies a painful la compana before ending the match with the pinning combination Mildred Burke made famous, the alligator clutch. Though Tiger Mask was in the midst of a grueling U.S. tour, he made no excuses after the loss. Quackenbush not only had a win and the title, but enough material for a two-part "Bell To Bell."

And yet, when the final word was written on May 11 in Portage, a win over Tiger Mask is exactly what I had. In addition to which, there was the NWA junior heavyweight title belt, currently on display about six feet from where I am sitting right now, typing away on my computer. That fateful night, all my frustrations about being overlooked for so long by the Japanese were exorcised, and I did more than just grab their attention in the process. I added my name to a list of incredible luminaries—from Danny Hodge to Gerald Brisco—and assured my place in the wrestling history books for posterity.

Beating Tiger Mask IV didn't exactly make me the most popular guy among Japanese puroresu fans, but it certainly got their attention ... perhaps even more than I had realized. I had barely been NWA junior heavyweight champion for two weeks when I got a call from a Mr. Inoki, who wanted to talk to me about my first title defense ...

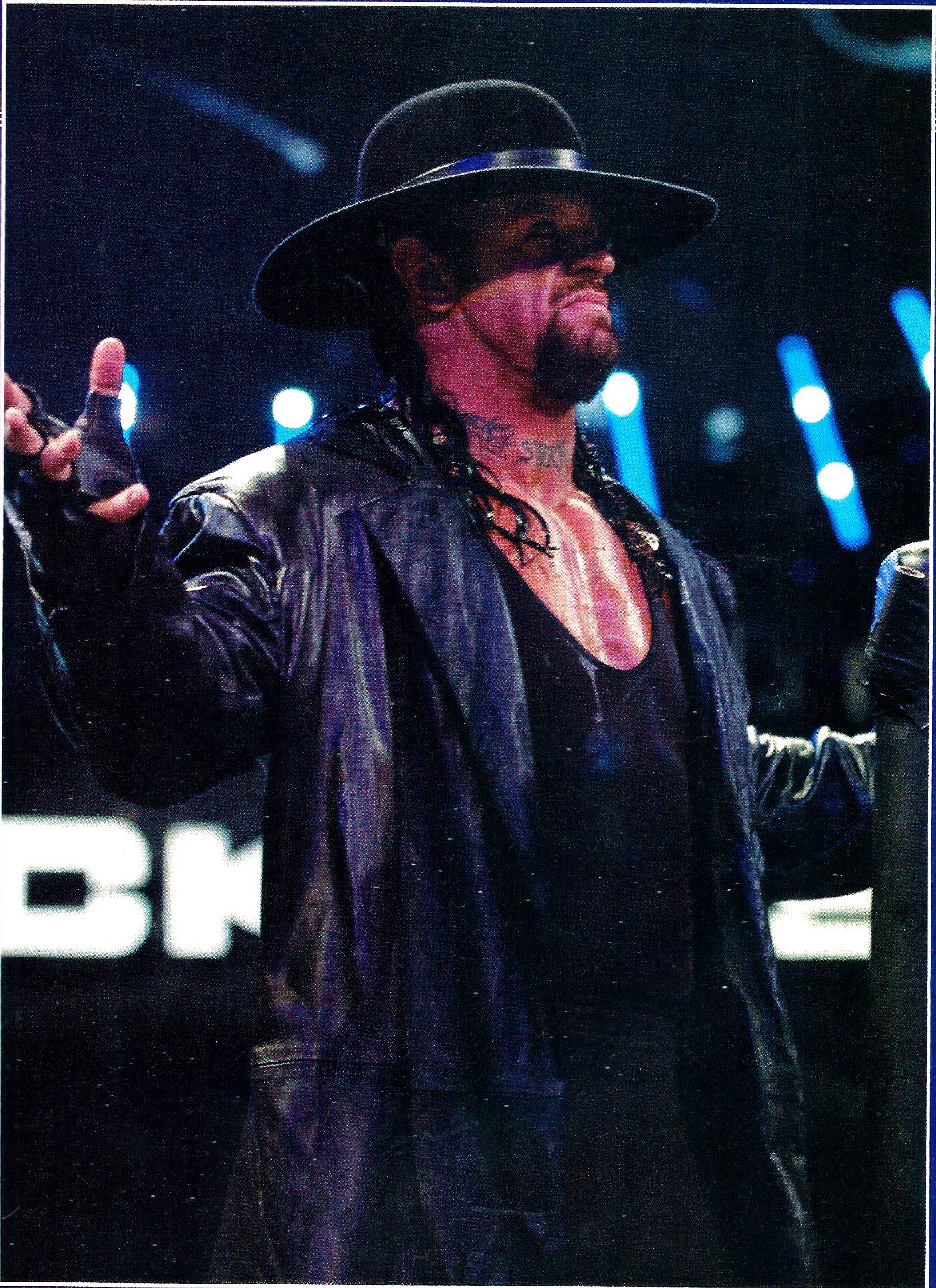
To be continued ... ☐

Spotlight On...

THE UNDERTAKER

FEW IN PROFESSIONAL wrestling have even appeared at 15 WrestleManias, let alone won 15 WrestleMania matches. But one man, The Undertaker, has established his legacy through that very feat ... In 1989, Mark Callaway—the future Undertaker—entered Memphis' USWA as the masked Texas Red ... Held two other masked identities in the USWA, The Punisher and Master of Pain ... As The Punisher, won the USWA heavyweight championship, and as Master of Pain took the USWA Texas heavyweight championship, achieving both wins in 1989 ... In late-1989, jumped to World Championship Wrestling as "Mean" Mark Callous, teaming with "Dangerous" Dan Spivey as Sid Vicious' replacement in The Skyscrapers ... Briefly feuded with The Road Warriors before entering singles competition in WCW ... Lost to U.S. champion Lex Luger at the 1990 Great American Bash ... His contract with WCW was not renewed ... Appeared at the WWF's Survivor Series 1990 as "Kane the Undertaker" and as a member of Ted DiBiase's Survivor Series team ... Referred to as "Kane" for a few short weeks before becoming only "The Undertaker" ... Managed by Ted DiBiase and then Brother Love before joining Paul Bearer ... Was undefeated through the first several months of his WWF tenure ... Made his first WrestleMania appearance, winning against "Superfly" Jimmy Snuka at WrestleMania VII ... Feuded with The Ultimate Warrior, famously locking him in a casket ... Turned his attention to Randy Savage, interrupting the SummerSlam wedding reception between Savage and Elizabeth ... Defeated Hulk Hogan for the WWF World championship at Survivor Series 1991 ... Lost the belt less than a week later back to Hogan at Tuesday in Texas ... Turned against ally Jake "The Snake" Roberts, leading to a victory over him at WrestleMania VIII ... Fought Kamala in a casket match at SummerSlam 1992 ... Defeated Damian Demento in the premiere episode of *Monday Night Raw* ... Defeated Giant Gonzales at WrestleMania IX for win number three at the big event ... Lost a cas-

March 1989: Mark Callaway debuts in the USWA as The Master of Pain. Within a few weeks of his first match, he becomes one of dozens of men to defeat Jerry Lawler for the USWA title. He holds the championship for 24 days.



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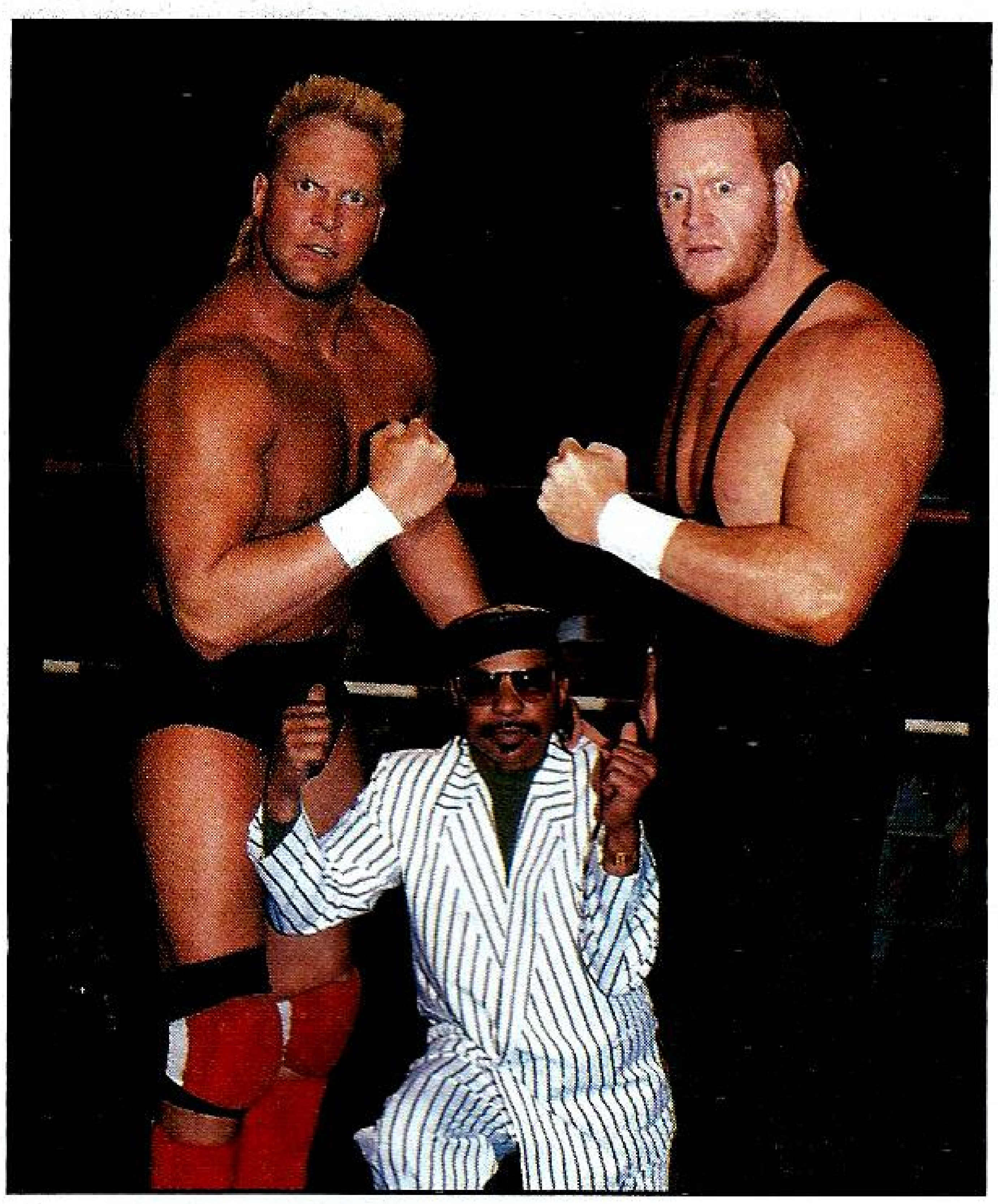
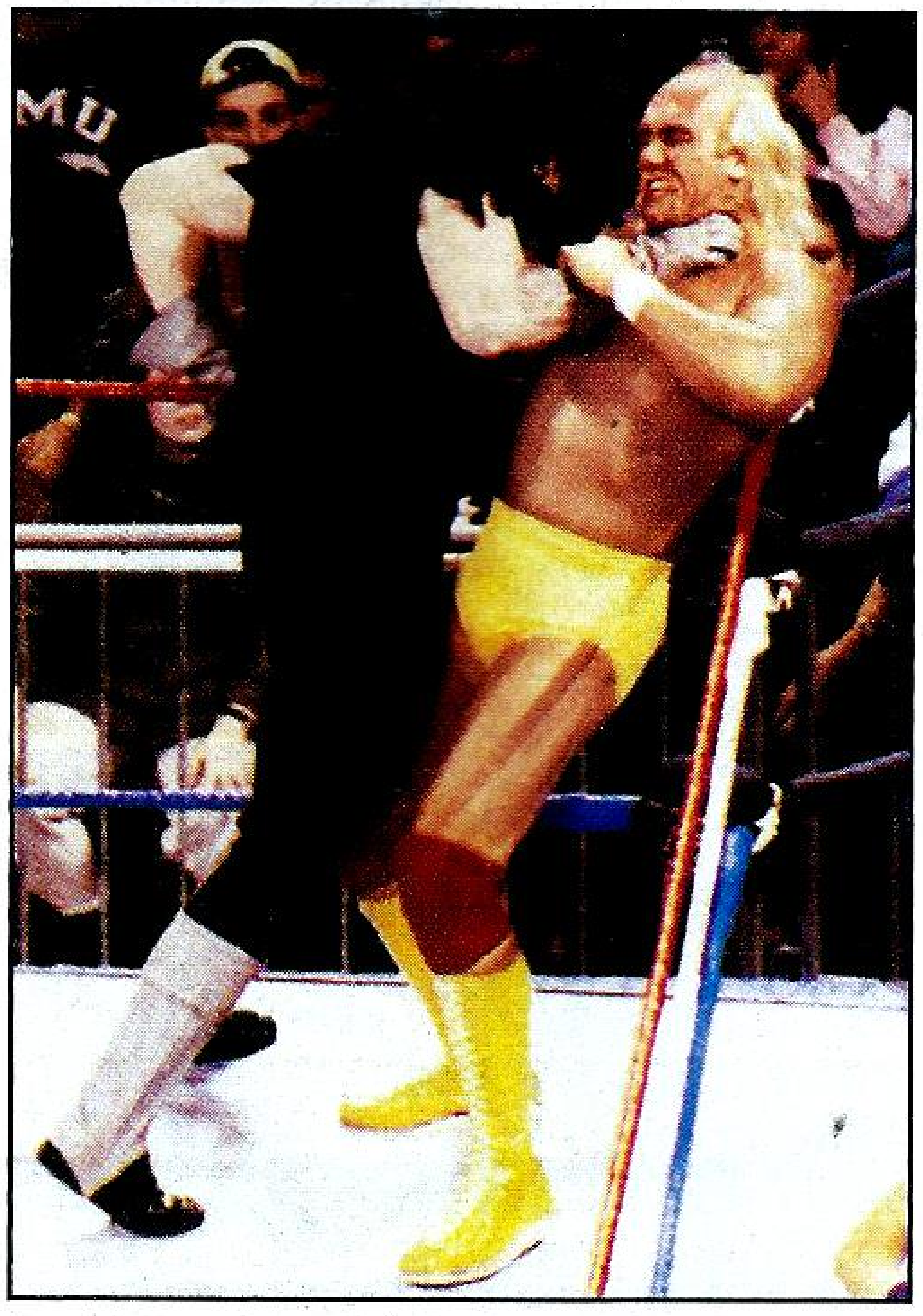
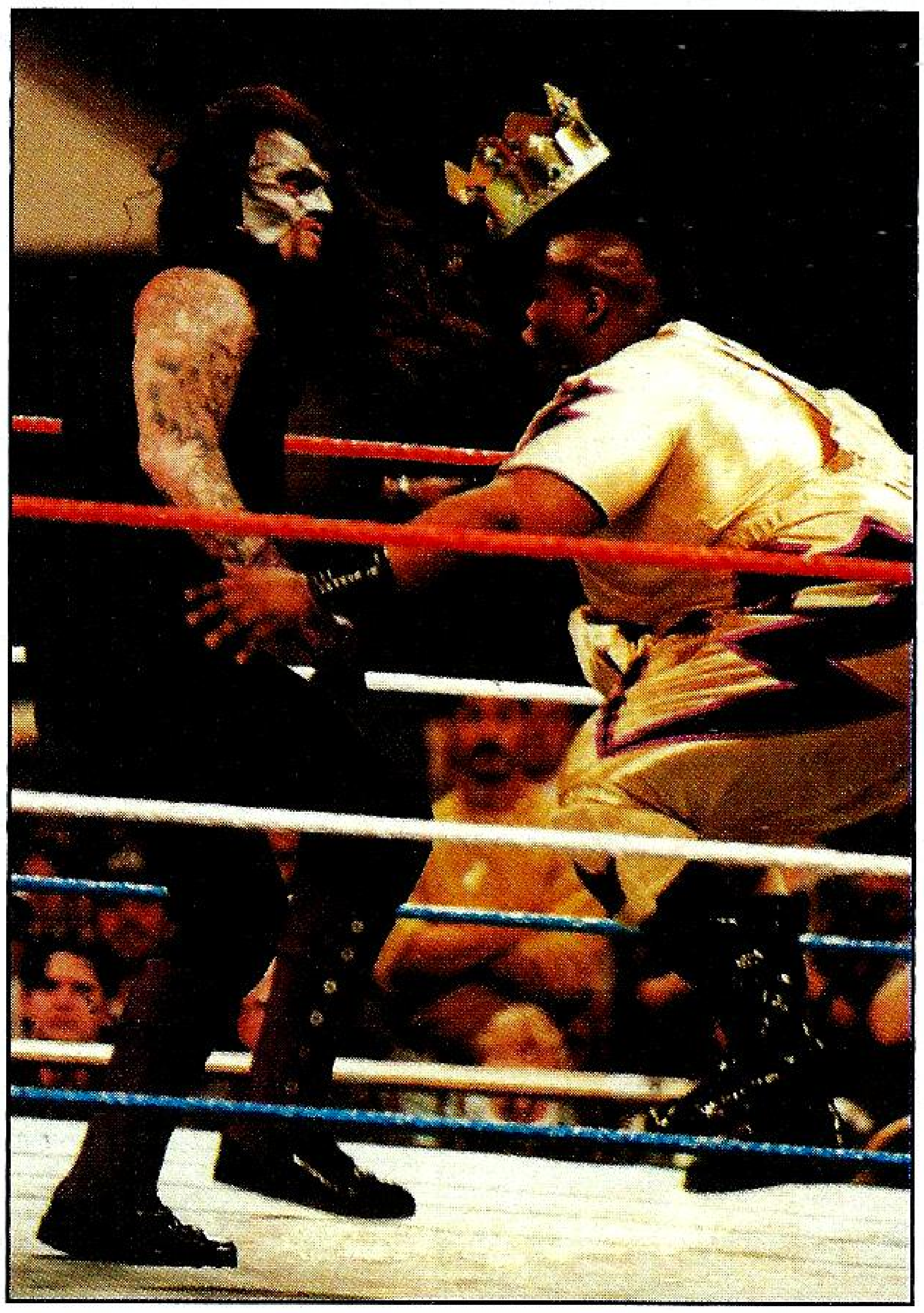


November 1989: As "Mean" Mark Callous, he goes to WCW to replace Sid Vicious as Dan Spivey's partner in the Teddy Long-managed Skyscrapers. They soon target The Road Warriors. Ever wonder why the Smackdown GM might be partial to Undertaker?

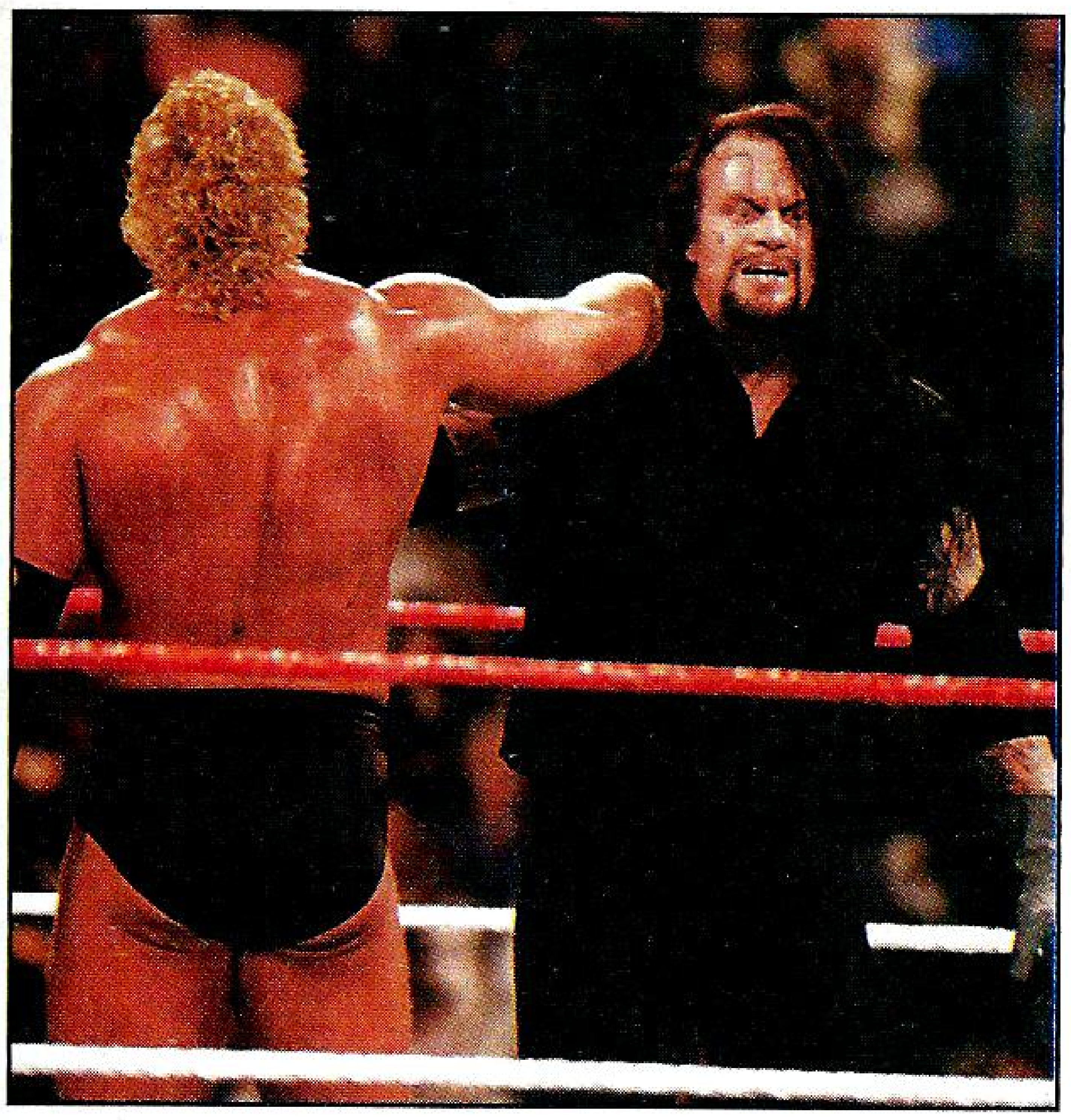
ket match to Yokozuna at Royal Rumble 1994, but swore vengeance from inside the casket—and the ominous threat was broadcast on the TitanTron ... Returned in late-summer 1994 after Ted DiBiase brought a fake Undertaker, played by Brian Lee, to the WWF ... Defeated the fake Undertaker at Summer Slam 1994 ... Defeated Yokozuna in a casket rematch at Survivor Series 1994 ... Defeated King Kong Bundy at WrestleMania XI ... Defeated Kama Mustafa in casket matches at In Your House and SummerSlam 1995 ... His face was injured by King Mabel ... Returned wearing a mask ... Got revenge on Mabel by winning another casket match in December 1995 ... Defeated Diesel (Kevin Nash) in a grudge match at WrestleMania XII ... Lost a casket match to Goldust when Mankind interfered ... Began a longtime rivalry with Mankind ... Paul Bearer joined Mankind, turning against Undertaker during the first-ever "Boiler Room Brawl" at SummerSlam 1996 ... Lost first-ever "Buried Alive" match to Mankind ... Paul Bearer sent The Executioner and Vader after Undertaker ... Defeated both of Bearer's charges ... Defeated "Psycho" Sid Vicious to win the WWF World championship at WrestleMania XIII ... Lost the belt to Bret Hart at SummerSlam 1997, thanks to an accidental chairshot from special referee Shawn Michaels ... Befriended Mankind, and the two occasionally teamed in the last part of 1997 ... Bearer announced that Undertaker killed his family in a fire, but that brother Kane remained alive and was coming to get The Undertaker ... Undertaker lost the first "Hell In A Cell" match to Shawn Michaels when Kane—in his first appearance—attacked him at Bad Blood 1997 ... Defeated Kane at WrestleMania XIV, win number seven at WrestleMania ... Set Kane's arm on fire in an "Inferno" match at Unforgiven 1998 ... Destroyed Mankind in the most famous "Hell In A Cell" match in WWF history at King of the Ring 1998 by throwing Mankind off the top of the cell, and later through the roof of the cell and onto thumbtacks ... Formed a team with Kane, and the two were nicknamed the "Brothers Of Destruction" ... The



November 1991: Callaway (now known as The Undertaker) beats Hulk Hogan for the WWF World title at Survivor Series. Ric Flair slides a steel chair into the ring, enabling The Undertaker to piledrive Hogan onto it and score the three-count.



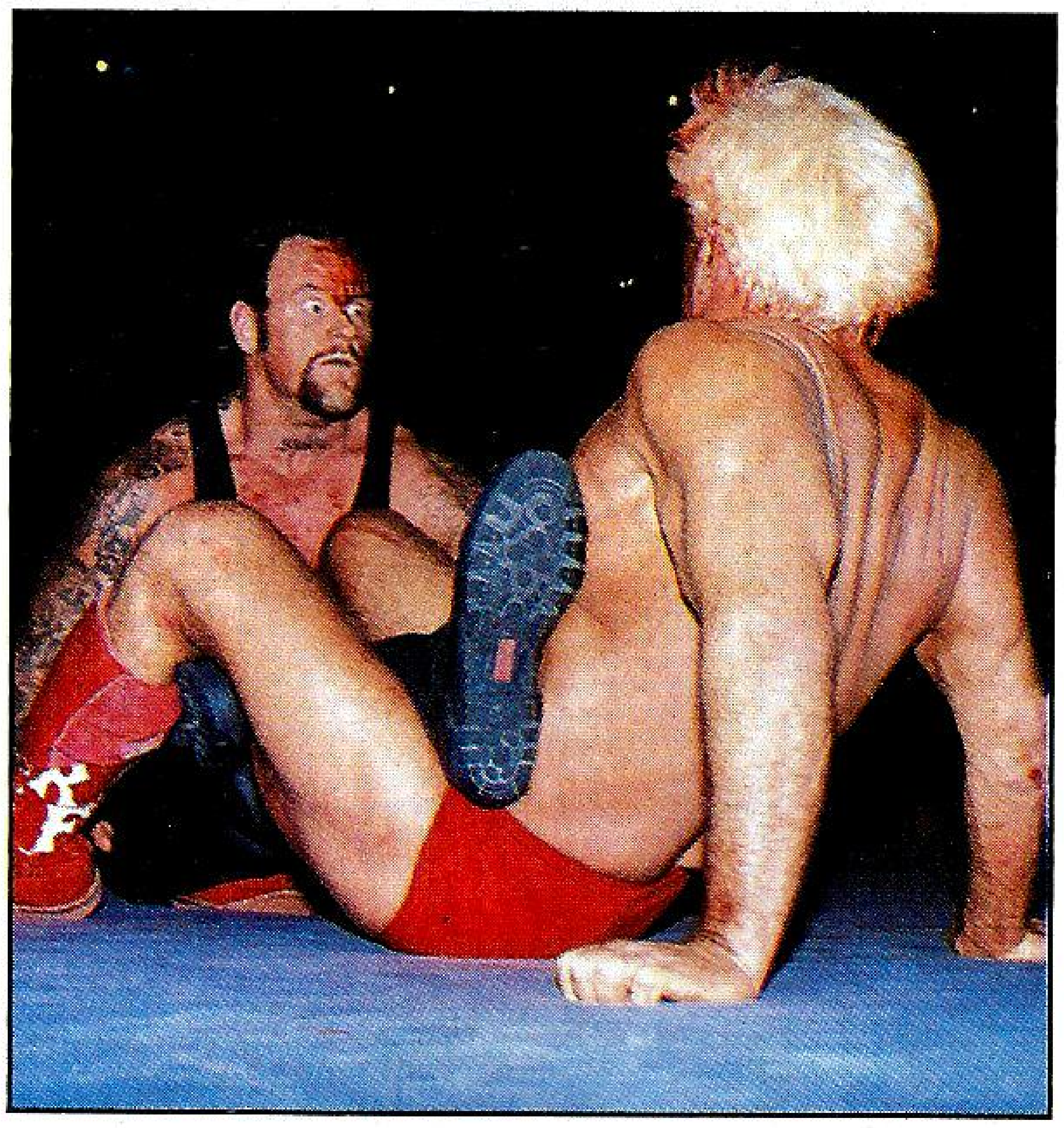
December 1995: Now a fan favorite, The Undertaker defeats King Mabel in a casket match at In Your House V. Undertaker wore a ghoulish protective mask because Mabel had injured his face several weeks earlier.



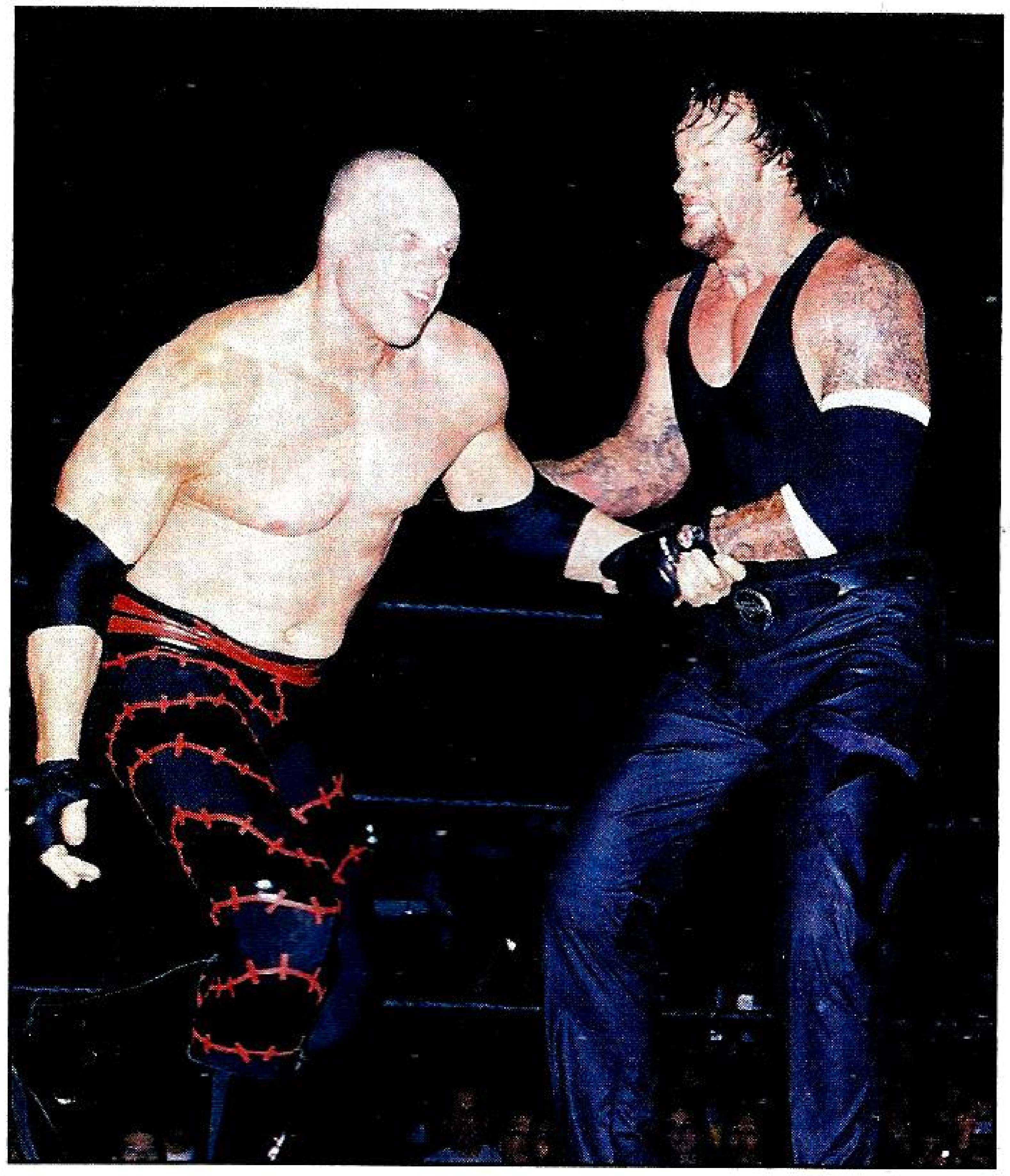
March 1997: The Undertaker beats Sid Vicious for his second WWF World title at WrestleMania XIII, thanks to Bret Hart's interference. It is perhaps Undertaker's biggest win at WrestleMania, considering it is the only time that he actually headlined the card.

team broke up and feuded again ... Lost a "Buried Alive" match to "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin at Rock Bottom 1998 ... Frustrated by recent losses, formed The Ministry, a dark stable comprised of The Acolytes, Mideon, Viscera, Gangrel, Edge, and Christian ... The Ministry constantly attacked the McMahon family stable known as The Corporation ... Kidnapped Shane McMahon ... Won an "Inferno" match against Kane on an early-1999 episode of *Monday Night Raw* ... Mutilated Stephanie McMahon's teddy bear ... Began a series of Ministry sacrifices, starting with Big Bossman ... Disguised as Kane, sent The Ministry to kidnap Stephanie McMahon, burning a symbol at the McMahon home ... "Sacrificed" Ken Shamrock's sister, Ryan, and threatened to do the same to Stephanie ... Defeated Big Bossman in a "Hell In A Cell" match at WrestleMania XV ... The Ministry broke up, but Undertaker still kidnapped Stephanie at Backlash 1999 ... Paul Bearer tried to perform an "unholy wedding," but Steve Austin rescued Stephanie ... Often referred to a "higher power" that he was serving ... The Ministry merged with Shane McMahon's Corporation to form the Corporate Ministry ... Defeated The Rock in a casket match on Raw, and then beat Steve Austin to win the WWF World championship at Over the Edge 1999 ... Vince McMahon was revealed to be the "higher power" and joined the Corporate Ministry ... Lost the WWF World championship to Steve Austin on the June 28, 1999, episode of Raw ... Teamed with The Big Show to defeat Kane and X-Pac at SummerSlam 1999 ... Traded the belts back and forth with The Rock and Mankind ... Suspended by Vince McMahon in September 1999 ... Returned as the motorcycle-riding "American Badass" at Judgment Day 2000 ... Feuded primarily with The Rock ... Renewed his partnership with Kane ... In late-2000, began rivalry with Kurt Angle ... Teamed with The Rock to win the WWF World tag team championship from Edge and Christian on a December 2000 episode of Raw ... Lost the tag belts back to Edge and Christian two weeks later ... Defeated Triple-H for his 10th WrestleMania victory at 'Mania X-7 ... Won the WWF World tag team belts with Kane on the April 19, 2001, Raw ... Lost the title to Steve Austin and Triple-H at Backlash 2001 ... Battled "Diamond" Dallas Page, who was stalking 'Taker's wife, Sara, as part of the ill-fated invasion storyline ... He and Kane won the WCW World

October 1997: Kane surfaces in the WWF as The Undertaker's long-lost brother, prompting their first nose-to-nose confrontation. They would have an on-again, off-again feud for the next seven years.

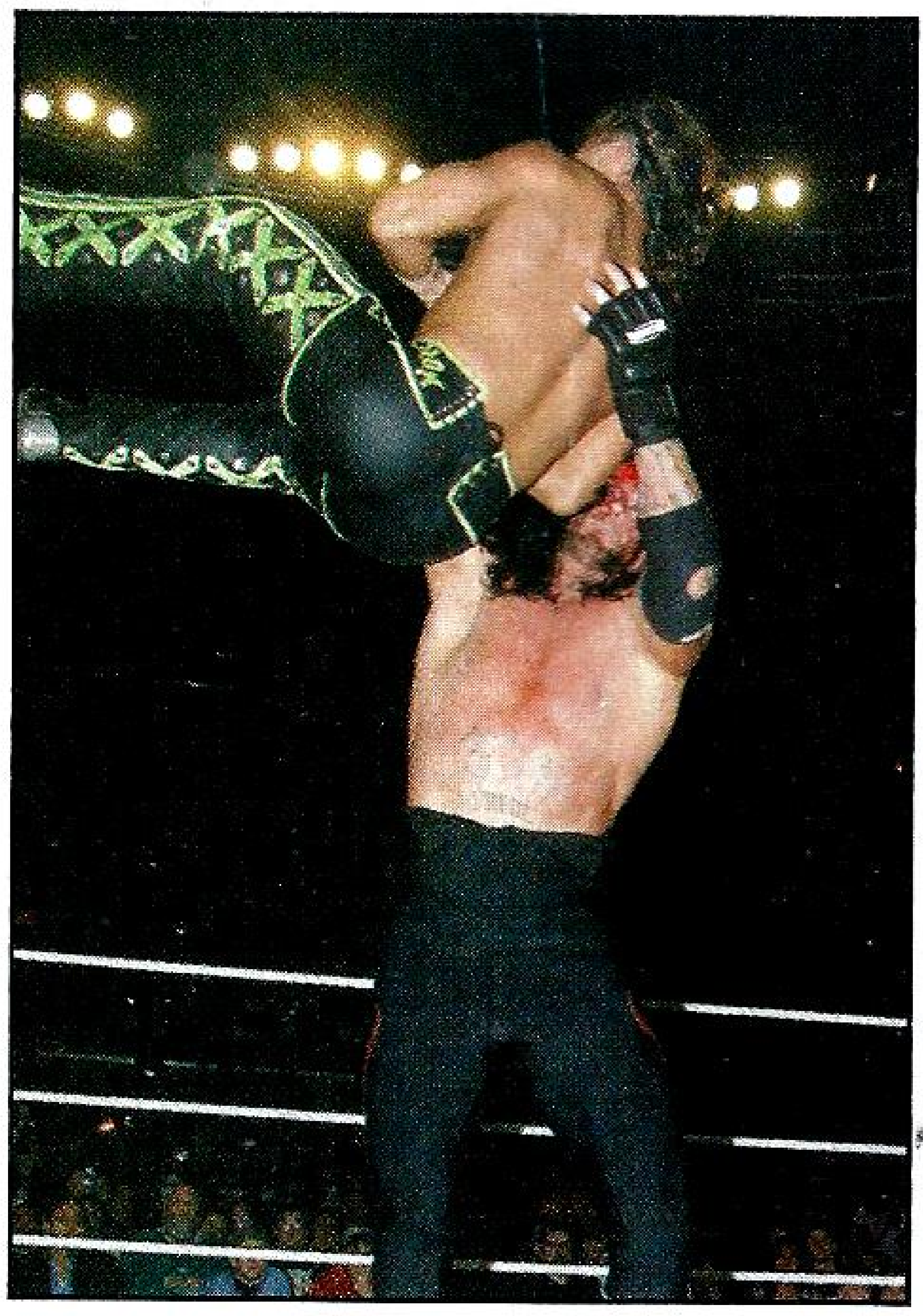


March 2002: Despite the contrast in styles, The Undertaker and Ric Flair deliver what is arguably the best match of WrestleMania X-8, second only to Rock vs. Hulk Hogan in sheer emotion.

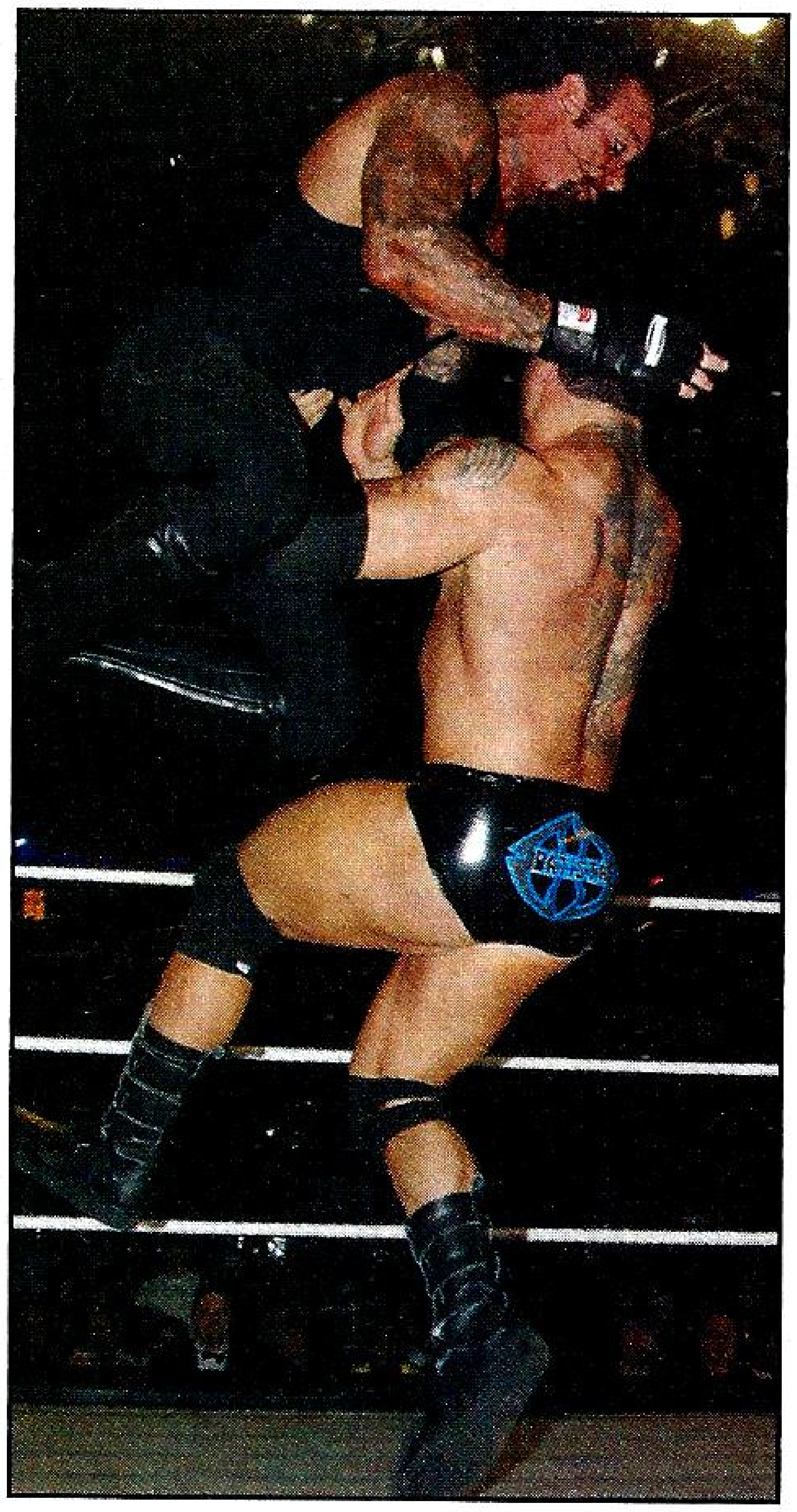


March 2004: The "Brothers Of Destruction" go at it one more time, as Kane—doing the bidding of Vince McMahon—seeks to finally destroy The Undertaker at WrestleMania XX. Kane falls prey to Undertaker's tombstone piledriver yet again.

tag team title from Sean O'Haire and Chuck Palumbo on Smackdown ... Unified the WCW World tag team title with the WWF World tag team title by beating DDP and Kanyon at SummerSlam 2001 ... Turned heel and attacked Jim Ross ... Became known as "Big Evil" ... Defeated Rob Van Dam to become WWF hardcore champion ... Lost the belt to Maven three months later ... Defeated Ric Flair at WrestleMania X-8 ... Won the unified WWF World championship from Hulk Hogan at Judgment Day 2002 ... Lost the belt to The Rock ... Defended America against the Un-American faction ... Lost a "Hell In A Cell" match to Brock Lesnar at No Mercy 2002 ... Disappeared after being attacked by The Big Show ... Returned to feud with The Big Show, defeating him and A-Train for win number 11 at WrestleMania X-9 ... Lost a "Buried Alive" match to Vince McMahon (with help from Kane) at Survivor Series 2002 ... Returned with his famed "Dead Man" character and manager Paul Bearer to defeat Kane at WrestleMania XX nearly six months later ... Feuded with Booker T and The Dudley Boyz for much of 2004 ... Lost a match to Bradshaw at SummerSlam 2004 ... Defeated Heidenreich in a casket match at Royal Rumble 2005 ... Defeated Randy Orton at WrestleMania 21 ... Had a controversial rivalry with Muhammad Hassan ... Lost to Randy and his father, Bob Orton Jr., who held a funeral in Undertaker's "memory" ... Lost a casket match to the Ortons and was "burned alive" at No Mercy 2005 ... Defeated Orton in a "Hell In A Cell" match at Armageddon 2005 ... Defeated Mark Henry in a casket match at WrestleMania 22 ... Feuded with The Great Khali ... Faced constant threat from Ken Kennedy through much of 2006 ... Entered the 2007 Royal Rumble at number 30 and became the first person to enter the Rumble last and win ... Defeated Batista for his unprecedented 15th win at 'Mania and the Smackdown World championship at WrestleMania 23 ... Following a steel cage match against Batista and an attack by Mark Henry at the May 11 Smackdown taping, Edge cashed in his "Money In The Bank" to win 'Taker's Smackdown World title ... After the match, druids carried 'Taker backstage ... Took a hiatus to heal from a torn right biceps ... Vowed to recapture the Smackdown World title later in 2007. ☐



January 2007: The Undertaker chokeslams Shawn Michaels all the way to hell en route to winning the Royal Rumble and a world title shot at WrestleMania 23. Somehow, Michaels—not Undertaker—would find himself in the 'Mania main event.



April 2007: At WrestleMania 23, The Undertaker overwhelms Batista with aerial, high-impact moves to win the Smackdown World title. Undertaker's fifth world title reign would last only a month, however, as a torn biceps forced him to drop the title to Edge.

Magnum T.A.

"You Can't Rule Out Miracles"

ON OCTOBER 14, 1986, the career of Magnum T.A.—one of the brightest stars in professional wrestling at the time—came to a tragic end. But that is also the date when the inspiring story of Terry Allen truly began.

Twenty years have passed since Allen's Porsche hydroplaned into a telephone pole on that rainy night in Charlotte, North Carolina, but the man formerly nicknamed "America's Heartthrob" is very much alive and well. He has been married to his current wife, Courtney, for two years, and they have a total of five children between them—and a pair of twins on the way. He is also the president of Magnum Cellular Service, a thriving cellular tower construction business.

If Allen had allowed it, the rest of his life could have been haunted by an ominous four-word phrase: "what could have been." Instead, Allen thrust himself into rehabilitation, slowly rebuilding his body, going from a C-5 quadriplegic to now walking without the assistance of even a cane.

Although his career ended prematurely, it was still impressive by any measure. Allen debuted in the Pacific Northwest in 1980, spent six months in the Southwest, and then logged another 18 months in Florida. By 1983, Bill Watts and Ernie Ladd were grooming "Magnum T.A." Terry Allen to be the Mid-South's top star. Thanks to a hot feud with teacher-turned-tormentor Mr. Wrestling II, Allen lived up to that billing.

Despite Watts' protestations, Magnum agreed to a pay cut and signed with Jim Crockett Promotions, a move that would give him the opportunity to headline in the Mid-Atlantic, his home region. The acquisition of Magnum and other Mid-South talent, in addition to securing the coveted Saturday 6:05 time slot on Superstation WTBS, helped the Crocketts make the NWA a viable competitor to Vince McMahon's expanding WWF.

Magnum's great battles involving the U.S. championship—against Wahoo McDaniel, Tully Blanchard, and Nikita Koloff—made him a hero from coast to coast. Indeed, his best-of-seven series against Koloff is a concept that has been copied many times over. Magnum also joined Dusty Rhodes to form America's Team, and, together, they had a knock-down, drag-out feud with NWA World tag team champions The Midnight Express.

However, the Virginia native earned his credentials as a main-event wrestler during a series of one-hour draws with NWA World heavyweight champion Ric Flair. To anyone watching the trajectory of Magnum's career, it was obvious that he was being groomed for the NWA title.

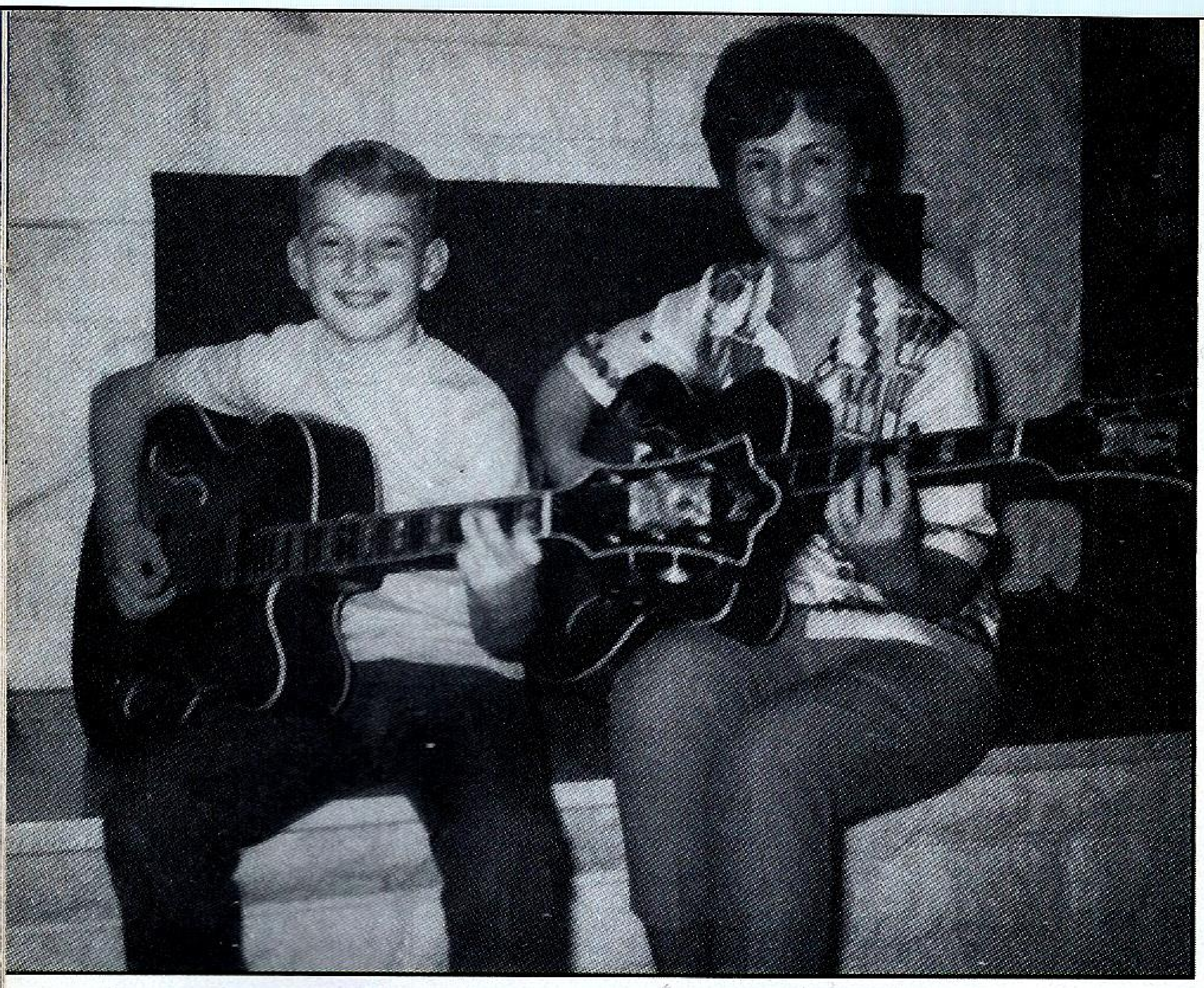
Due to that rainy night in Charlotte, that moment never took place. "Not once did Allen come off as bitter or as a victim," noted Editor-in-Chief Harry Burkett, who spent 90 minutes talking with Magnum. "I don't think he ever went through the phase of self-pity that is understandably characteristic of people who suffer from catastrophic injury. He handled his personal adversity in the same way that he approached his career—with class and dignity."

Q: We've wanted to talk to you for a long time, Terry, because your story has to be considered one of the most intriguing in the history of the business. Recently, I read an article about you in *The Virginian-Pilot*. You had attended an indy show held in your honor. Is it flattering to know that your career had such an impact?

A: Absolutely. It never ceases to amaze me because my actual in-ring career was rather short. It came to

> **"As a teenager, I watched Wahoo McDaniel and Johnny Valentine nearly beat each other to death [...] Later, more athletic guys like Jimmy 'Superfly' Snuka and Rick Steamboat really piqued my interest."**

Photo by Courtney Allen



At an early age, Terry Allen—playing the guitar with his mother in this vintage shot—realized he wanted to become a performer. Of course, he combined that passion with his athletic tendencies and became a superstar wrestler.

an untimely end when I was only 27 years old. I had an opportunity to work on top for three years, and was in the business for only a total of six years. But my career was a whirlwind of activity and occurred during an exciting time in the wrestling industry, when the foundation was being laid for what wrestling has become today.

Q: Retired wrestlers often tell me that it's hard for them to move on with regular jobs because fans are always recognizing them. Does that happen to you often?

A: Quite often. I still live in the Carolinas, where Jim Crockett Promotions had a huge presence. There were about 200 wrestlers living in Charlotte at one time, long before there were any pro football or basketball teams, and wrestling was the only game in town.

Q: You were born and in this part of the country, weren't you?

A: I was born in Norfolk, Virginia, raised in Chesapeake, and moved to Virginia Beach while attending college. That whole Tidewater area is my home turf. My mom and dad still live there, and I see them quite often. My dream was to come back and retire there, but I had no idea how life would turn out. My career-ending accident changed a lot of my plans.

Q: Did you grow up watching Mid-Atlantic wrestling?

A: My earliest memories of television were watching wrestling with my dad when I was only six, seven years old. As a teenager, I watched Wahoo McDaniel and Johnny Valentine nearly beat each other to death, and I remember big guys like Blackjack Mulligan, "Big" John Studd, and Sgt. Slaughter. Later, more athletic guys like Jimmy "Superfly" Snuka and Rick Steamboat really piqued my interest.

I was an athlete myself. I began amateur wrestling in the ninth grade and went on to win the Virginia State championship in 1977. In Snuka and Steamboat, I saw guys who had good physiques, were good athletes, and were great performers. That's when I started thinking that I had potential as a wrestler.

Q: I also understand that you were a musician.

A: Yes, I studied jazz guitar from the age of eight to 17. I never played in any bands or anything like that, but I did work security in several nightclubs in Virginia Beach. That's how I made some of my initial contacts with some of the boys in the wrestling business.

Q: About seven years ago, I had the honor of spending the day with Lou Thesz at his home in Virginia Beach. He had high praise for you. How did you meet him?

A: I had a great deal of respect for Lou. He settled in Virginia Beach after a long career, and he was a hero to me. He had an amateur background, was a shooter, a tough guy. When I was just starting out in San Antonio, the Blanchards brought in Lou to be a special referee for several matches. Thanks to Lou's influence, I always tried to emphasize wrestling—despite the outrageousness and the brawls—and present myself as a wrestler first and foremost.

Q: In what area did you actually break in as a wrestler?

A: I traveled all the way to Portland, Oregon.

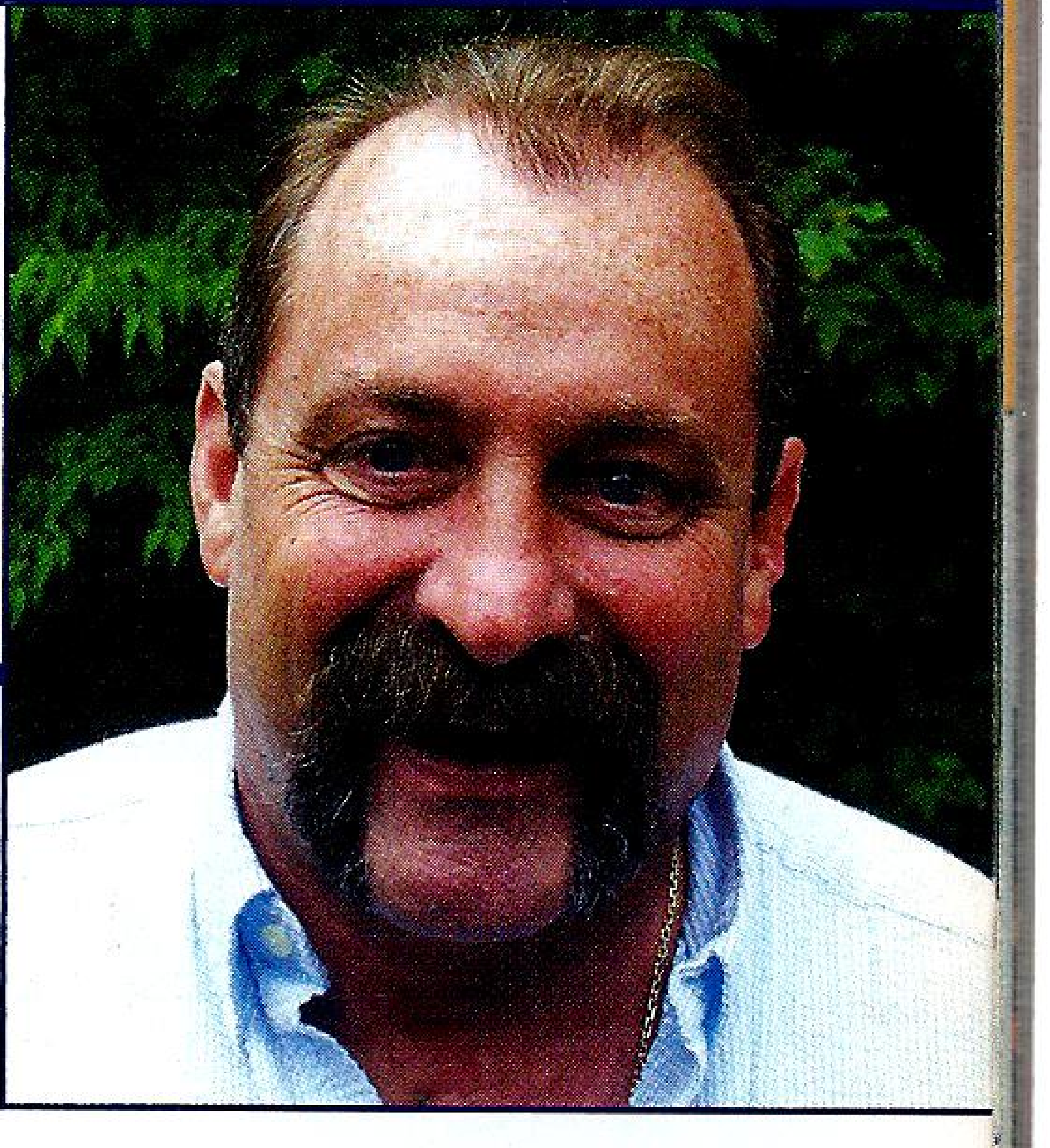
Q: That must have been a big step for a southern boy.

A: It was. At first, I was going to stay in the Mid-Atlantic and maybe see Gene Anderson, who was having one of those old wrestling tryout gimmicks. But the object of that was to prove to the general public how tough wrestling was, and it really didn't help you start a career. I knew it was a bad idea to start in your home area because first impressions are the longest lasting. I knew I needed to learn the ropes elsewhere. That's when I came to know Buzz Sawyer. Remember him?

Q: Sure.

A: Buzz was here in the Mid-

> **"I drove to Portland, where Buzz [Sawyer] introduced me to Don Owen. I had only been in the ring for training two times, and then I was put it into a match against Buzz on television. From then on, I worked five to seven times a week for the rest of my career."**



Atlantic, and he took me under his wing. Buzz went on to Portland, and he asked me to drive to Tampa, pick up his little brother, Brett, and drive him to the Mid-South. While there, I rode up and down the roads with guys like Jake Roberts, Jimmy Garvin, and Cocoa Samoa. Paul Orndorff was the top star in the territory at the time. It was an educational experience.

After that, I drove to Portland, where Buzz introduced me to Don Owen. I had only been in the ring for training two times, and then I was put it into a match against Buzz on television. From then on, I worked five to seven times a week for the rest of my career.

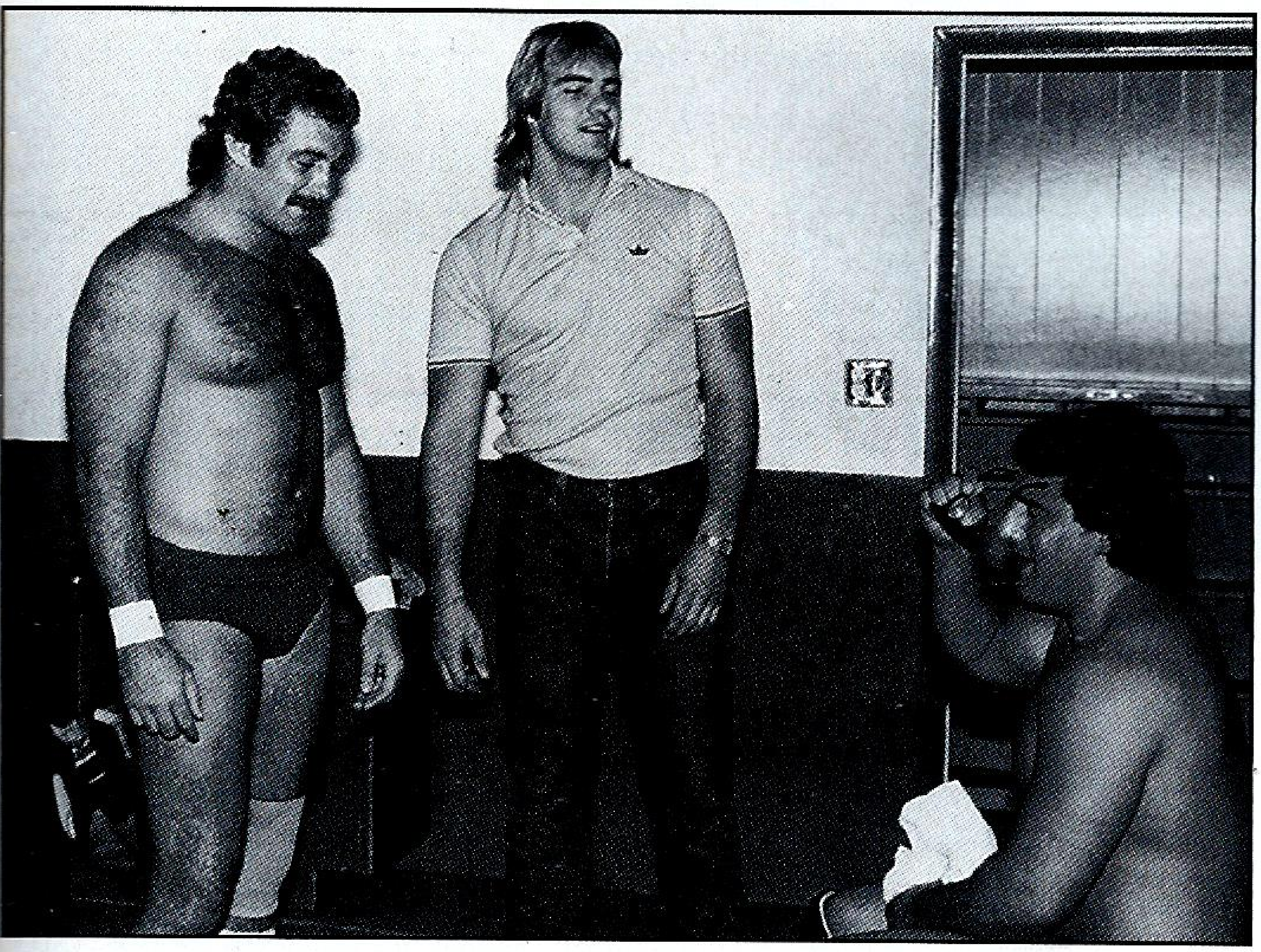
Q: How long were you in the Northwest?

A: I was there for six months. I left there and worked for Joe Blanchard in San Antone for another six months. There, I met his son, Tully, Gino Hernandez, Tank Patton, Buck Robley, Scott Casey, Tom Prichard, just a host of fellows. Manny Fernandez and I became particularly good friends. In San Antone, I learned more of the technical aspects of wrestling, aside from the slams and backdrops I'd learned up in Portland.

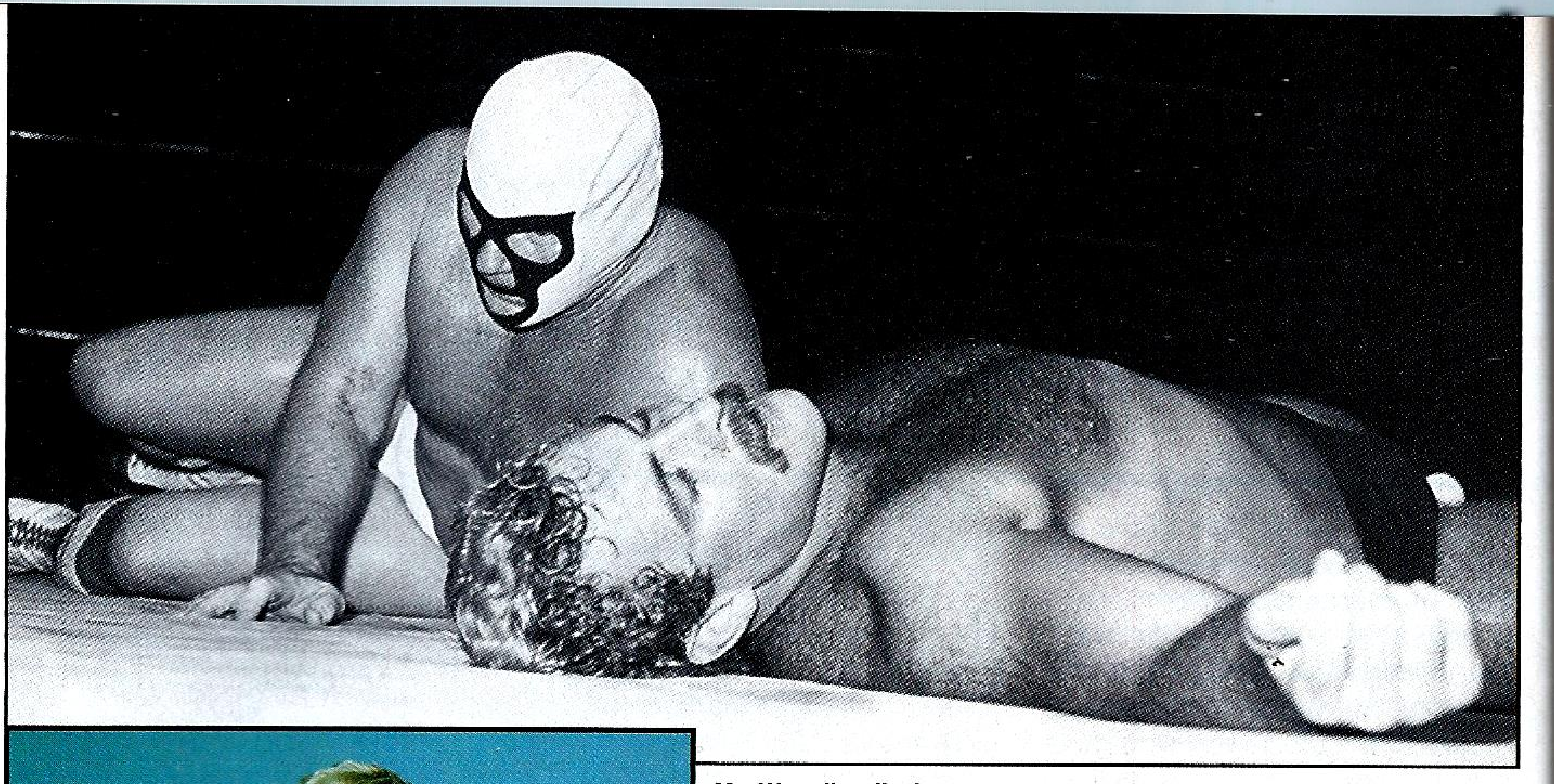
Six months into it, Mike Graham came in for some shots, and we hit it off like someone I'd known my entire life. We tore up the town a little bit, had a really good time, and he told his dad, Eddie, about me. So, Eddie asked me to come to Florida, and I shook hands with Joe and left. Mike and his dad taught me about psychology, all the technical points that make a match, and how to tell a story in the ring.

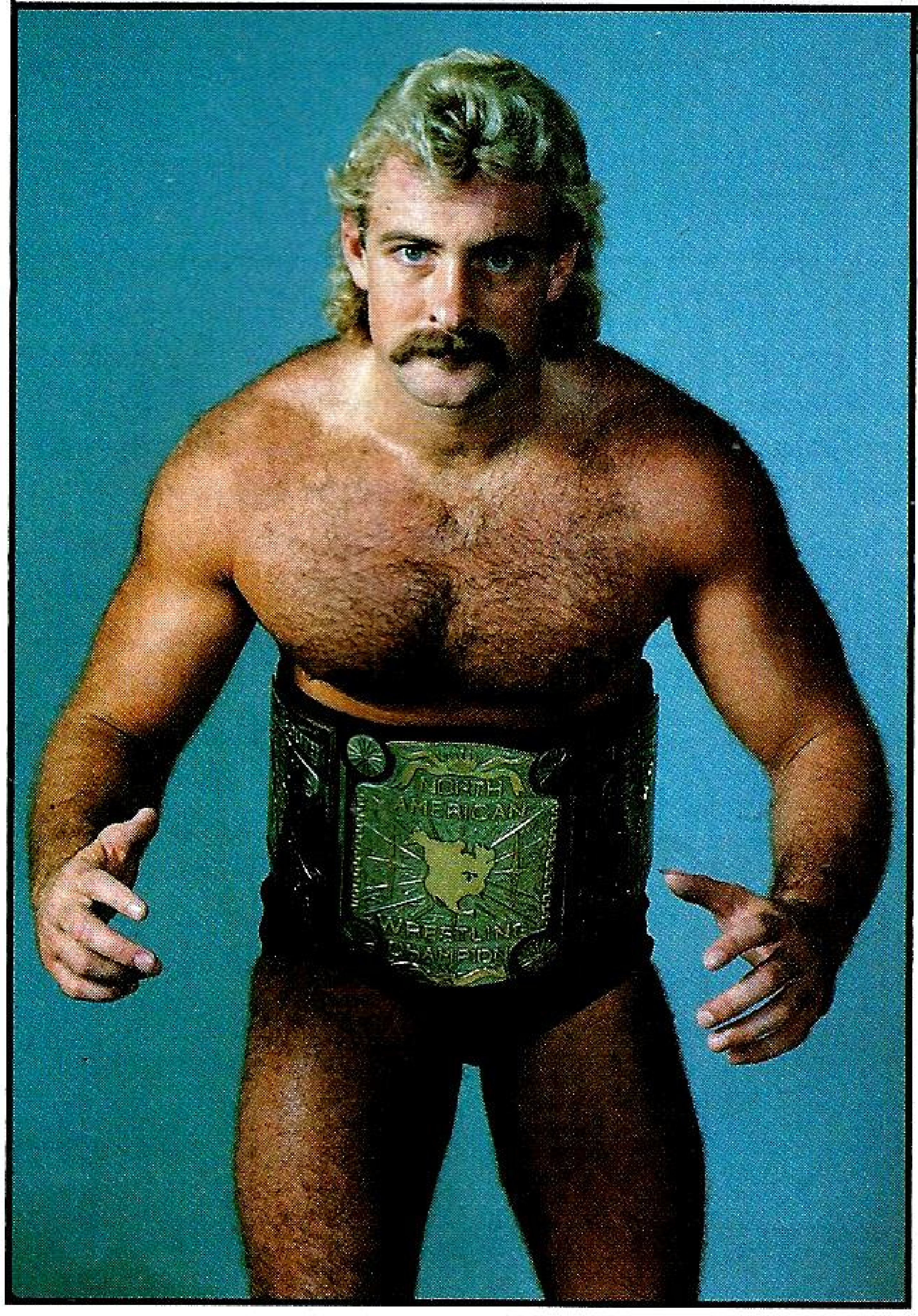
At about that time, Dusty Rhodes replaced Dory Funk Jr. as the booker. Dusty and I hit it off and immediately became friends. I stayed in Florida for a-year-and-a-half. The weather was beautiful, and I was able to go home every night. Of course, there was a big party going on, along with the work. Barry Windham and I were inseparable in those days. I was really happy there, content in the middle of the card. But that changed one morning when I had breakfast with Andre the Giant.

Q: Do you remember what he had for breakfast?



During his early career in Florida, Allen formed a solid friendship with Barry Windham. Whether it was Orlando, Tampa, or Miami, they thoroughly enjoyed Florida's social scene. Perhaps they're planning a night on the town with Scott McGhee.





Mr. Wrestling II tries to regain enough breath to cover his former protégé. This feud took a lot out of both men, but it turned out to be a breakthrough in Magnum T.A.'s career (above). Magnum won II's North American title and emerged as the Mid-South's top star (left).

A: I don't remember anything but tables full of food. Andre was such a likeable guy. We had met in my Portland days. I had a four-door Olds 98, a great big car that Andre felt comfortable in. I drove him around for about a week or two in Portland, and we traveled together again in Florida.

At breakfast, Andre suddenly looked at me and said, "You need a handle. You look like Tom Selleck in *Magnum P.I.* You should be 'Magnum T.A.'" It was as simple as that. Andre said he would speak to Vince Sr. about giving me a shot in New York. But, during that same period of time, Ernie Ladd came in for a shot in Florida. He was the booker in Louisiana, and Paul Orndorff had just left Louisiana for New York. He and Bill Watts were looking for another white-meat babyface like Orndorff. So, I got a call in the middle of the night from Ernie, and he offered me the top spot as the top babyface in Louisiana. I was making about $300 or $400 a week in Florida, and I was glad to be there, but this was my first opportunity to be a headliner.

So, I took the name "Magnum T.A." and went to Louisiana. But, after six months and a good push, Ernie still couldn't figure out what to do with me. Ernie was about to give up when Dusty came in to work a guest shot. He thought I should go back to Florida and develop the Magnum character more. Because I always rode motorcycles, Dusty said I should come in as a lone wolf character riding a Harley-Davidson. I bought a new Harley in Baton Rouge and was about to go when Bill Watts stopped me. Bill came up with a bunch of new ideas. He had also just brought in "Superstar" Bill Dundee as the new booker, and he had plenty of ideas from Tennessee.

Their first idea was to put me in a tag team with Mr. Wrestling II in what would become my first main-event angle. We feuded with The Midnight Express and Jim Cornette, and then II turned on me. He also turned heel against Junkyard Dog and took his North American title. So, II and I embarked on this big angle, and I ended up beating him for the North American title. Through that experience, I learned main-event angles and

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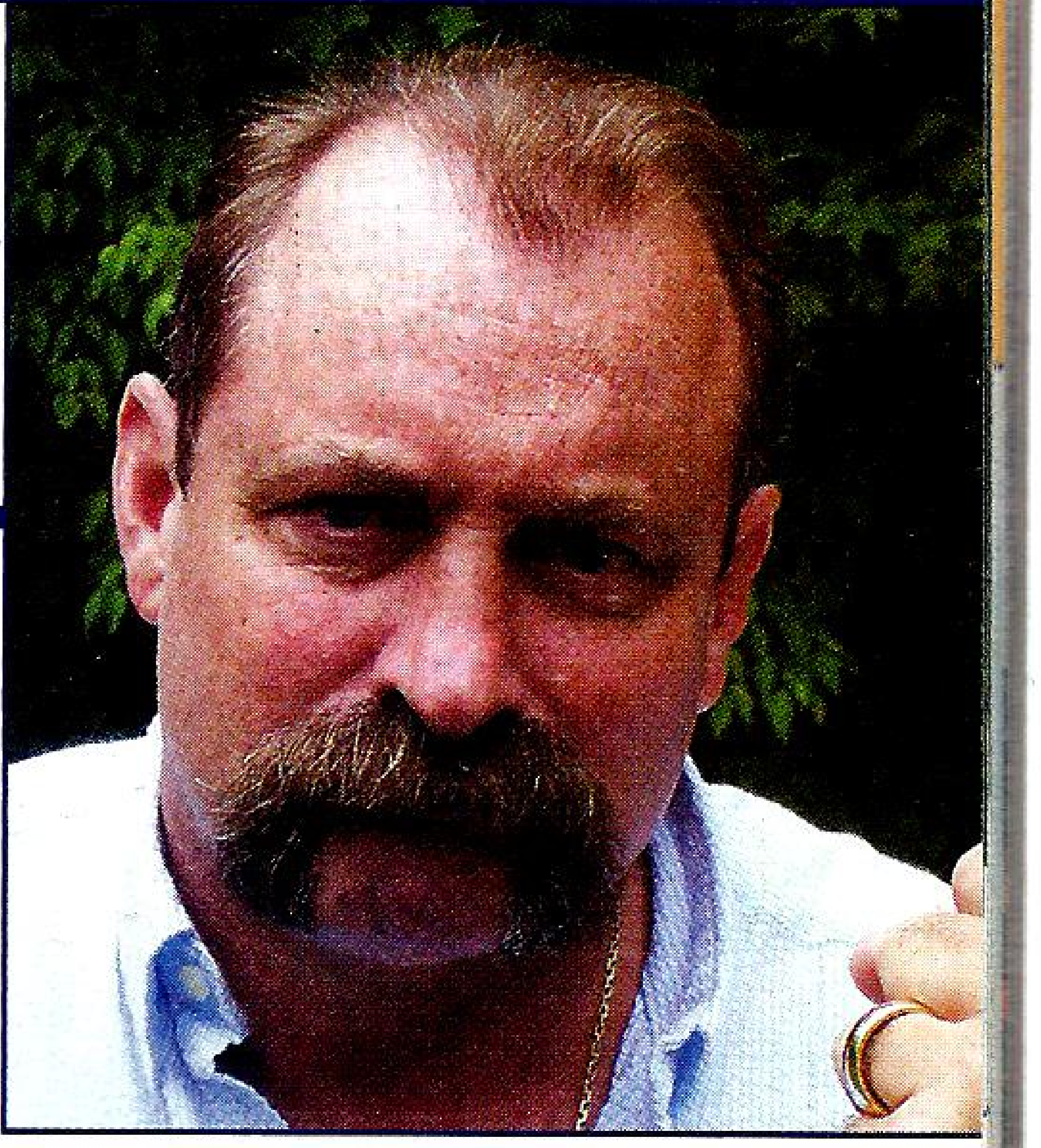


interviews, and learned how to draw money.

Q: The first time I really took notice of you was during that angle. If you consider the Bruno Sammartino-Larry Zbyszko angle to be the classic teacher-student feud, I would have to say that Magnum vs. Mr. Wrestling II was definitely number two. It was actually better in one sense, though, because people don't expect the teacher to turn against the student. And Mr. Wrestling II turning heel was unthinkable.

A: Totally unthinkable. Johnny [Walker] was a great worker in his day, but he didn't like the idea of turning heel. He was used to outwrestling and outsmarting his opponent, and had all these cutesy moves. But when he finally clicked and realized getting heat was a good thing, he was a great heel. It was a great moneymaking scenario. Like you said, besides Bruno and Larry, there probably wasn't another angle of that magnitude in the history of the business. It gave me an education because I was working with Mr. Wrestling II, a crafty old guy who always knew how to make himself look good, sometimes at my expense. But Bill Dundee and Grizzly Smith smartened me up—and told me when I was doing something that didn't put me in the right light.

Those were lessons that all wrestlers should know if they're going to work on top. When you're young and green, you keep your mouth shut, listen to the old-timers, and follow their path in the ring. But, when you become a marketable commodity and have potential starpower, you've got to protect that. I got a great education working for Bill Watts and those fellows, and I'll never forget it.

Q: Then you took that Harley-Davidson and rode it straight into Jim Crockett Promotions.

A: Everything is timing. When I was on top working for Bill, I was making over $100,000 per year—not bad for the early-'80s. Then I got a call from Dusty, who had gone to work for Jim Crockett Jr. The territory was in the gutter, with guys maxing out at about $450 or $500 per week. It was miserable. The top babyface was Wahoo McDaniel, who was a tremendous legend in the business, but it wasn't like having a young Ricky Steamboat to quarterback the team. Barry Windham followed Dusty to Crockett, but left after only six or eight weeks because he didn't want to be financially ruined.

Anyway, Dusty put me on the

Magnum T.A. exploded on the scene in the NWA, soon after Jim Crockett Promotions had secured a deal with Superstation WTBS. After defeating Wahoo McDaniel for the U.S. title, he became embroiled in a violent feud with Tully Blanchard (pictured).

Dusty Rhodes and Magnum T.A. had been friends since their days in Florida. Together as America's Team, Dusty and "Maggie Mae" were an unbeatable combination. Their feud with The Midnight Express was especially memorable.

phone with Jim Crockett Jr. I explained to Jimmy that I was making about $2,000 a week. Jimmy said, "I can't guarantee you that kind of money, but I can promise that you will make at least $700 a week and I'll give you the opportunity to be the biggest star we've got." My dream had always been to come to my home area and work on top. I had gained enough confidence, working in front of crowds of 8,000 and 10,000, so I had a feeling it could be successful.

So, I gave my notice to Bill. That was gut-wrenching. Bill couldn't believe his top babyface was going to leave. I worked out a six-week notice. At the team meetings we had at the television tapings in Shreveport each week, Bill forced me to endure lectures on how foolish I was being. He made sure I put over everybody in the territory as I was going out the door, which I was happy to do. Bill made me feel like a complete nut.

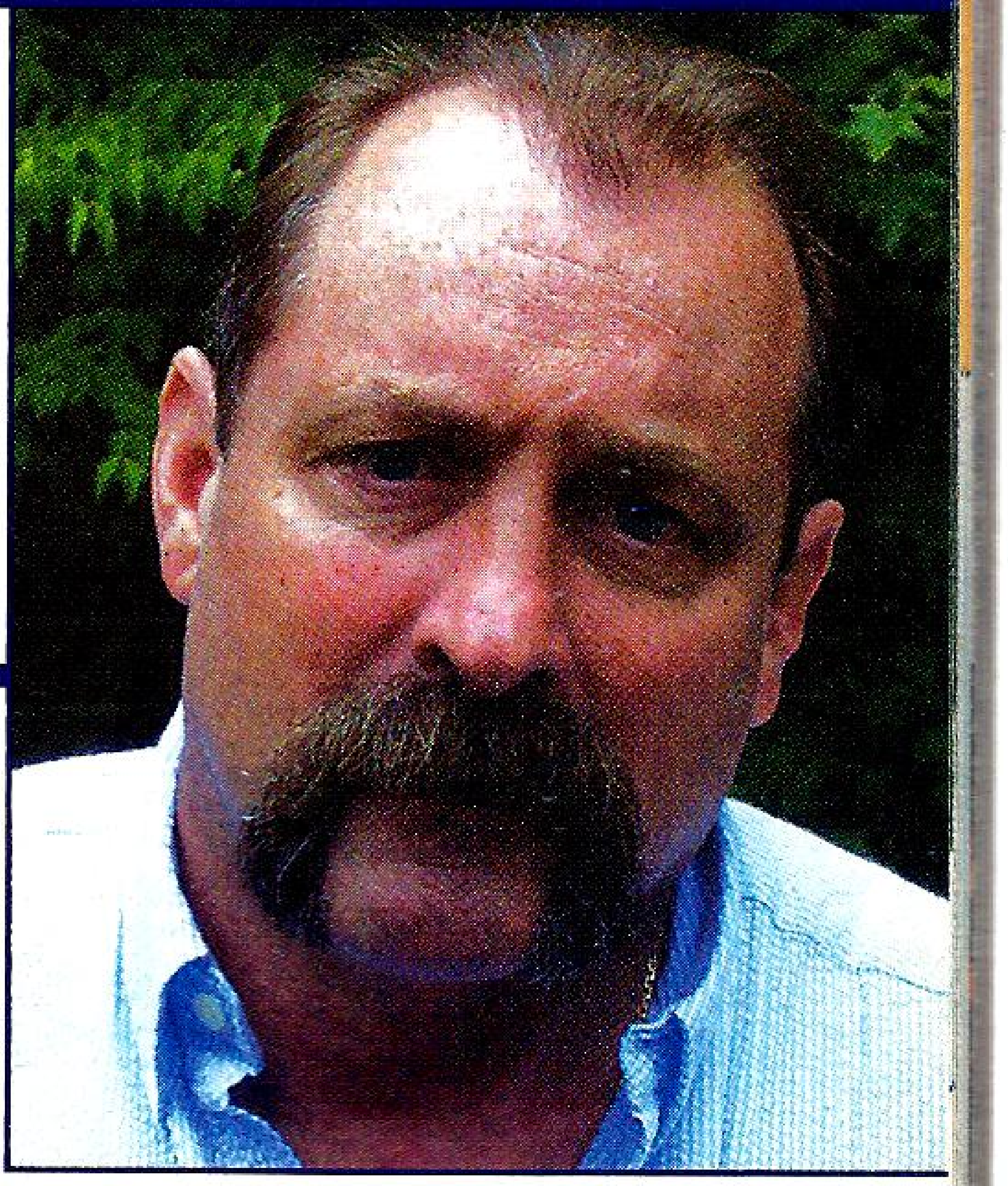
Fortunately, Jimmy made good on his word, and I never had less than a $1,000 week. I remember the exact moment when I realized that company was about to make a complete turn for the better. Dusty and I were walking out of a hotel in Atlantic City, and we were told that Jimmy had just made a deal to get us on the Superstation in Atlanta. Within weeks, the business turned completely around. When I went on WTBS, I seemed to have appeared out of nowhere. I had over three years of experience, probably 1,200 matches, but no one had seen me. That made it seem as if I had exploded on the scene. I routinely won my matches in 10 or 15 seconds, which prompted people to pay to see me in the arenas. I soon went into an angle with Ric Flair, and we did many hour broadways.

Q: I remember one particular angle on the Superstation, when you offered him $1,000 if you couldn't beat him in 10 minutes.

A: Yes, that's right. He also brought out a coat and tie, saying that he was going to dress me like a real man, and I belly-to-bellied him in the ring. I grabbed the belt and dropped it on David Crockett's podium. Flair thought I had stolen the belt, and I remember David being so smug, saying, "Magnum says the next time he puts his hands on that belt, it'll be his." Those silly, subtle angles worked back then.

Anyway, that TBS platform opened up the world for us. When that door opened, I was like the Pied Piper, with all these Mid-South guys—The Midnight Express and Jim Cornette, The Rock 'n' Roll Express, Terry Taylor, Buddy Landell, and Krusher Krushchev—following me to Crockett Promotions. We took that show that was selling out in Mid-South and took it national. Plus, there was already tremendous talent here, such as Tully Blanchard, Nikita Koloff,

> **“I was working with Mr. Wrestling II, a crafty old guy who always knew how to make himself look good, sometimes at my expense. But Bill Dundee and Grizzly Smith smartened me up—and let me know when II was doing something that didn't put me in the right light.”**



Wahoo, Flair, and Dusty.

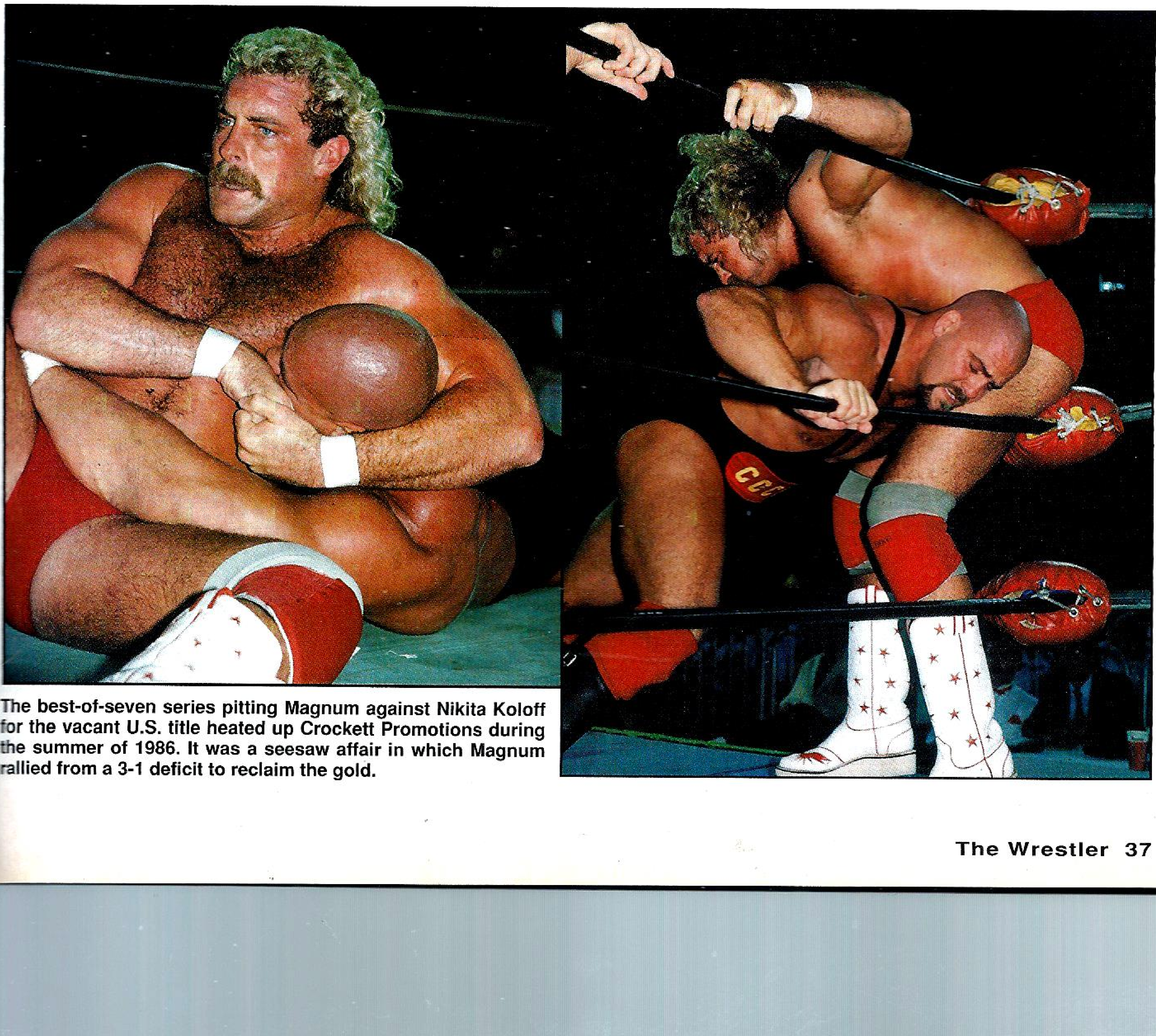
Q: Obviously, you were popular because of the “John Wayne effect,” meaning that you were tough enough and a good enough guy that male fans liked you, but, as Andre so astutely pointed out, you looked like Tom Selleck, so female fans loved you. That's what made you such a big star.

A: I grew up watching John Wayne and Clint Eastwood, so I had a very clear vision of what a hero should be. I became John Wayne on a Harley. I knew I had this character inside me. I was able to hone that character during my time in Mid-South. I had been forced to wear three-piece suits, punk rock outfits, you name it. When they finally threw up their hands, that's when I brought out the leather jacket and the motorcycle. You're right, I was a tough guy, but still had vulnerabilities so people could relate to me.

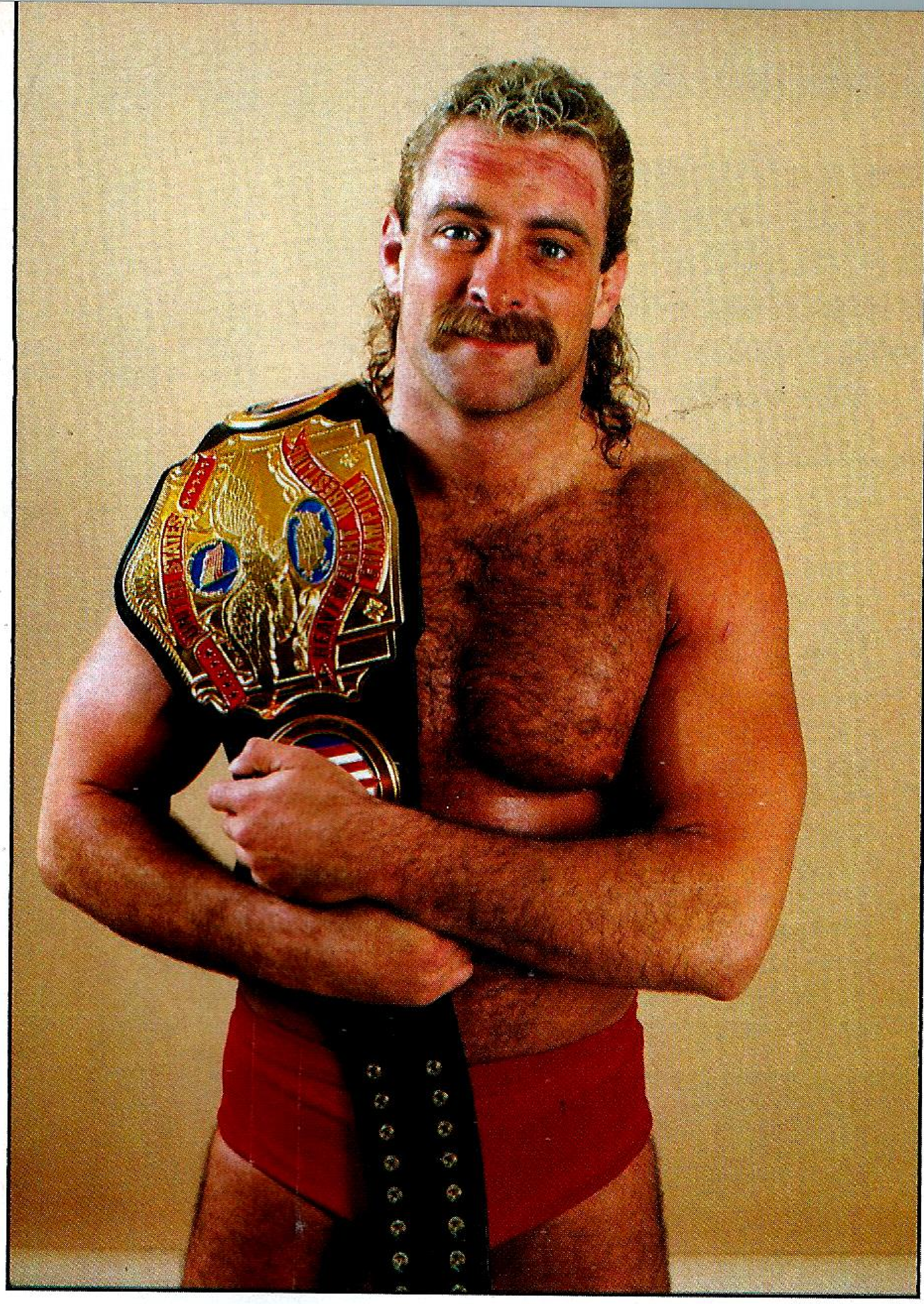
Q: What was the greatest extent to which a female fan tried to make contact with you?

A: I don't want to downplay this, but, honest to goodness, so many things like that happened that I can't single out one incident *[laughs]*. I always enjoyed a good rapport with the opposite sex before wrestling, but never had any idea what the medium of television would do.

Q: Another factor was that a much larger percentage of the



The best-of-seven series pitting Magnum against Nikita Koloff for the vacant U.S. title heated up Crockett Promotions during the summer of 1986. It was a seesaw affair in which Magnum rallied from a 3-1 deficit to reclaim the gold.



Because of his titanic struggles against Wahoo McDaniel, Tully Blanchard, and Nikita Koloff, Magnum T.A. is remembered as one of the greatest U.S. champions of all-time. After all, he kept the belt from going to the U.S.S.R.!

audience bought into what was happening in the ring.

A: That was the goal, to send people home scratching their heads about at least one match.

Q: During that era, what was it like to walk into a store or restaurant? After all, you were Magnum T.A., the guy standing up to the Russians. Were people giving you tips on how to beat Nikita?

A: When I had my accident, people told me they thought The Four Horsemen had done something to the brakes in my car. We lived those characters 24/7. We didn't socialize outside the arenas if there was the risk of jeopardizing an angle. We did whatever was necessary to protect an angle or a persona. It was a different era that will never be recaptured.

Q: My most memorable Magnum moment occurred when you brought your mother to the contract signing for an upcoming U.S. title defense against Nikita Koloff. Ivan Koloff put down your mother, and said she belonged in the kitchen. Of course, you attacked the Russians and, later, NWA President Bob Geigel officially reprimanded you. And I remember only two words from you: "Reprimand this!" Then you punched Geigel in the mouth!

A: *[Laughs].* Pow! I told Bob, "I'm going to lay this in pretty good. Are you ready?"

Q: You knocked his glasses off!

A: Yeah, I knocked the mess out of him. Of course, Bill Apter almost got killed when he did an interview with me at the Crocketts' taping facility.

Q: Ah, yes, "*PWI* Scouting Reports."

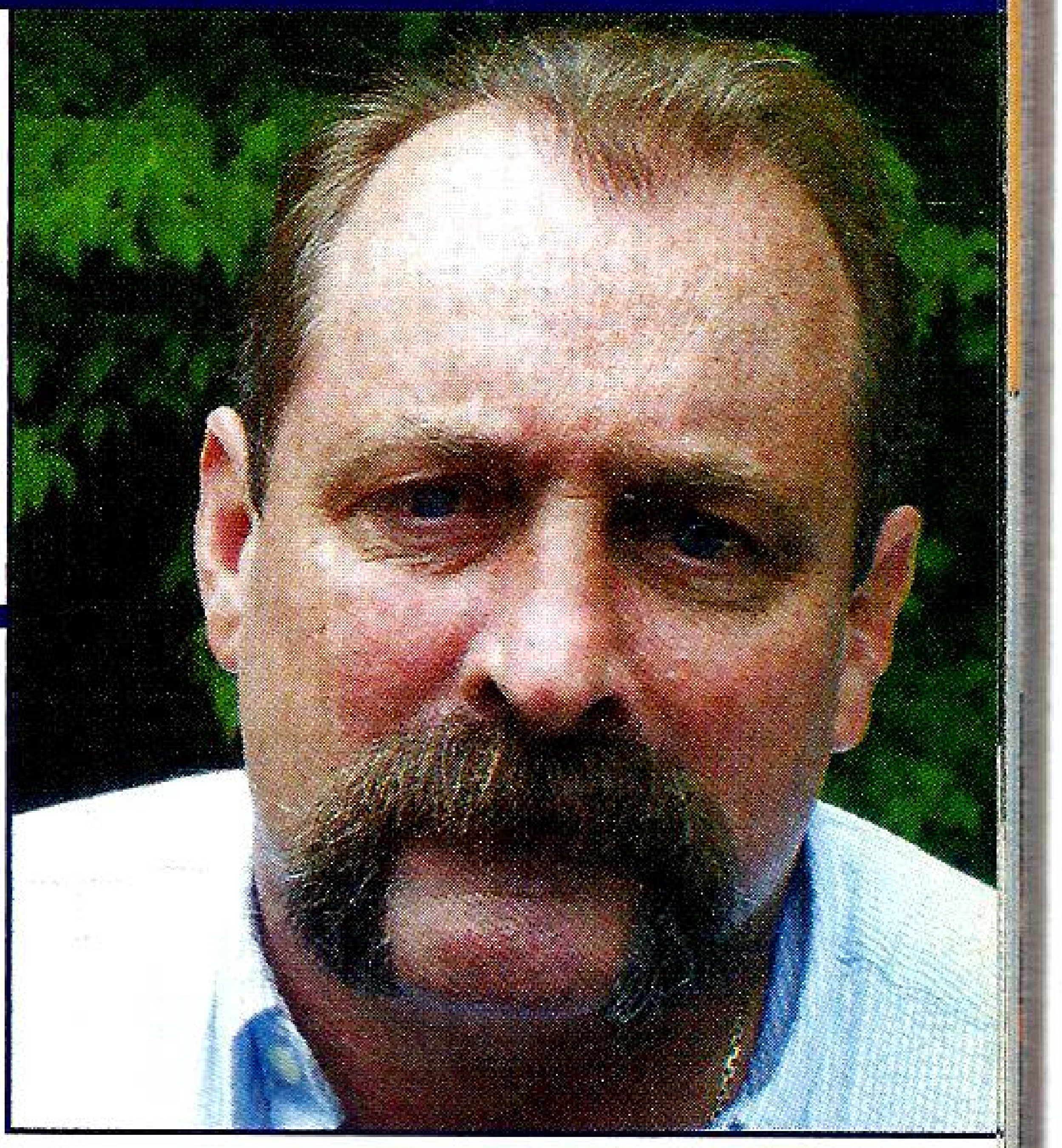
A: During our interview, Apter got on my case about the Geigel incident and said I had no right to strike the NWA president. He made me so mad that I left the set. From what I understand, Apter got a lot of hate mail after that incident. People had a chance to live vicariously through the struggles they perceived us to be having. The angle with Nikita had a tremendous impact on my career. It was the first time that I was the senior member, the ring general who set the pace in the ring. Until that angle with him, I had a lot of questions about what I would do with someone green in the ring. After that, I knew I had what it took to be NWA champion someday.

Q: Of course, your best-of-seven series against Nikita was a groundbreaking concept that has been repeated many times.

A: Dusty and Flair were always talking about the great best-of-seven showdowns between the Celtics and the Lakers. The best-of-seven series was a natural, considering the controversy between Nikita and me, and it took that rivalry to a fever pitch. Coming off my dramatic feud with Tully to regain the U.S. title, it was perfect.

Q: Speaking of Tully, I remember a funny segment in which Tully sent Baby Doll to "straighten you out." She confronted you during an interview and said, "Magnum,

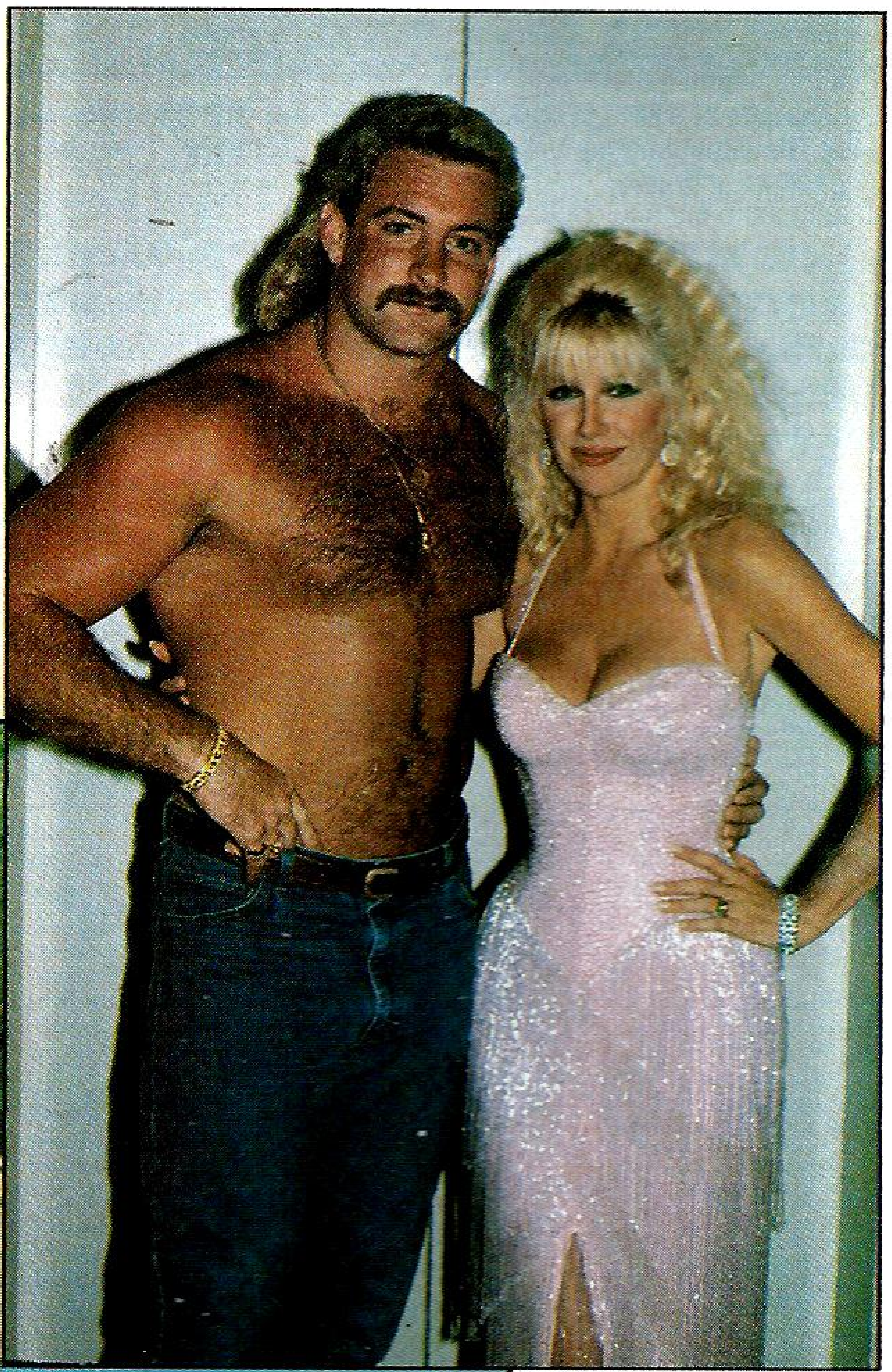
“When I had my accident, people told me they thought The Four Horsemen had done something to the brakes in my car. We lived those characters 24/7. We didn’t socialize outside the arenas if there was the risk of jeopardizing an angle.”

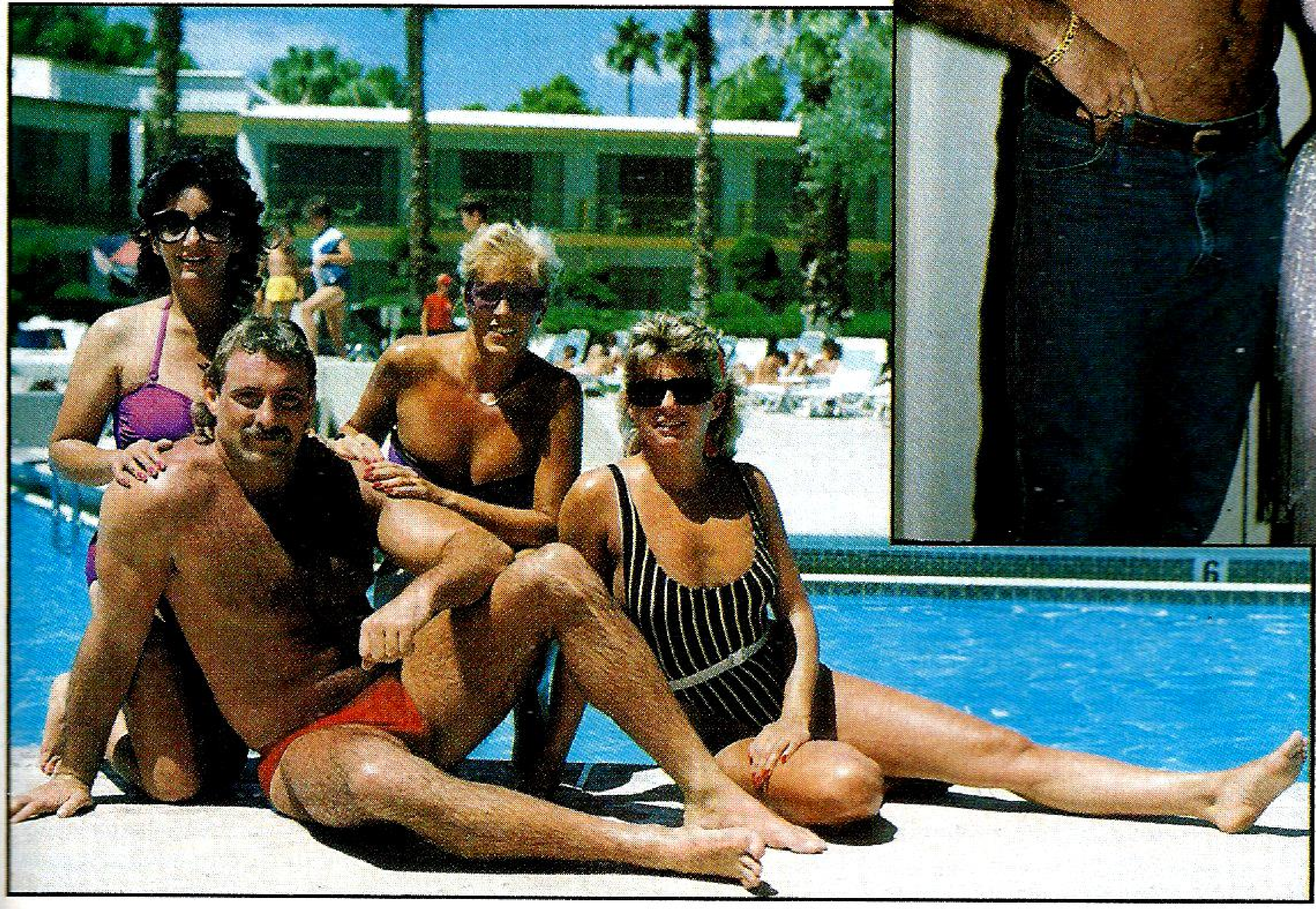


your problem is you can’t handle a woman like me.” You immediately said, “I have no desire to handle a woman like you!” Considering that sexuality was kept to a minimum in those days, it was a quick, funny line.

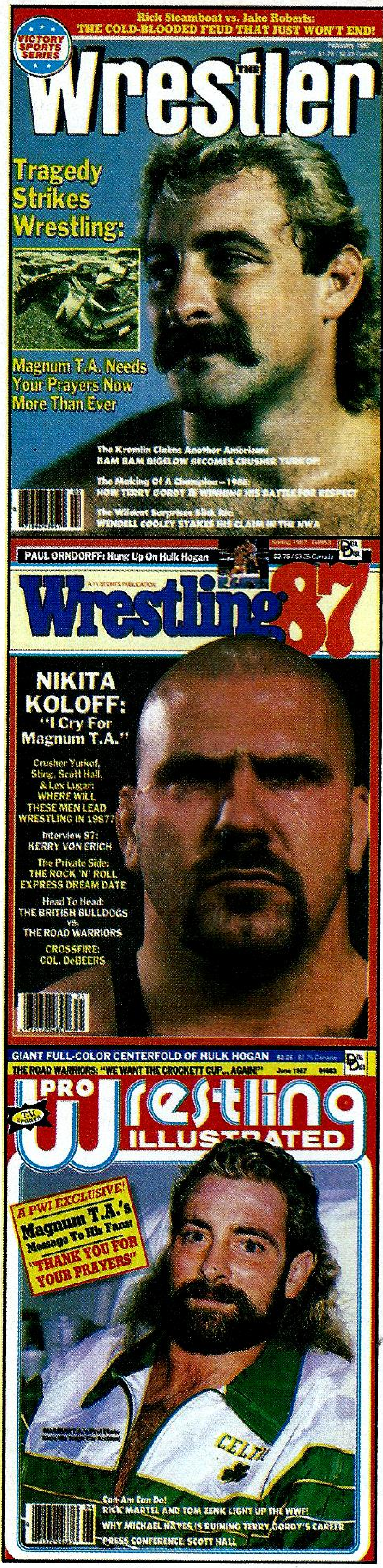
A: None of those things were scripted back then. I never knew what was coming out of my mouth. That improvisation is what made it so much fun. I loved interviews more than anything else. You could shoot and talk any kind of trash. It was entertaining because it was a constant joust. I would hear the interviews the heels had made, and then I would respond, and we’d go back and forth. Fans enjoyed it because it was so personal. We would stare at the camera like we were boring a hole through it. It was as if we were talking directly to that fan sitting on the couch at home. Wrestling is missing that today.

Q: I know what you mean. Ronnie Garvin gave a pretty rough promo, but he was believable. You never knew whether he was about to stumble or say something meaningful, and that kept your attention. By 1986, your promos and matches had really come together and it seemed as if you were poised to be-





Magnum had a reputation for being a ladies’ man to go along with his wholesome boy-next-door image. Whether Magnum was sunbathing poolside in Las Vegas (left) or hanging out with Suzanne Somers (above), he always attracted the opposite sex.


Rick Steamboat vs. Jake Roberts: THE COLD-BLOODED FEUD THAT JUST WON'T END!
VICTORY SPORTS SERIES
The Wrestler
Tragedy Strikes Wrestling:
Magnum T.A. Needs Your Prayers Now More Than Ever
The Kremlin Claims Another American: BAM BAM BIGELOW BECOMES CRUSHER YURKOF!
The Making Of A Champion—1986: HOW TERRY GORDY IS WINNING HIS BATTLE FOR RESPECT
WENDELL COOLEY STAKES HIS CLAIM IN THE NWA
PAUL ORNDORFF: Hung Up On Hulk Hogan
Wrestling 87
NIKITA KOLOFF: "I Cry For Magnum T.A."
Crusher Yurkof, Sting, Scott Hall, & Lex Lugar: WHERE WILL THESE MEN LEAD WRESTLING IN 1987?
Interview 87: KERRY VON ERICH
The Private Side: THE ROCK 'N' ROLL EXPRESS DREAM DATE
Head To Head: THE BRITISH BULLDOGS vs. THE ROAD WARRIORS
CROSSFIRE: COL. DeBEERS
GIANT FULL-COLOR CENTERFOLD OF HULK HOGAN
THE ROAD WARRIORS: "WE WANT THE CROCKETT CUP... AGAIN!"
PRO Wrestling ILLUSTRATED
A PWI EXCLUSIVE! Magnum T.A.'s Message To His Fans: "THANK YOU FOR YOUR PRAYERS"
Can-Am Can Do! RICK MARTEL AND TOM ZENK LIGHT UP THE WWF!
WHY MICHAEL HAYES IS RUINING TERRY GORDY'S CAREER
PRESS CONFERENCE: SCOTT HALL

Magnum's tragedy resulted in three of the most famous wrestling magazine covers of all-time. The February 1987 issue of THE WRESTLER provided initial coverage of the accident (top), the Spring 1987 issue of *Wrestling 87* detailed how a former foe became a friend (middle), and the June 1987 issue of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated* documented the start of his inspiring recovery (bottom).

Q: You were in above-average physical shape at the time of your accident. Do you think that being an athlete saved your life?

A: Many people have alluded to that. I think the discipline and work ethic I had utilized to build up my body were key in helping me in rehab. I have since seen better physical specimens than myself who weren't nearly as fortunate. You can't rule out miracles. Without something happening that would have enabled these nerves to regain function and these muscles to get signal again, it wouldn't have mattered how much effort I put out. I have a friend who lives in Monroe, Louisiana. He was 10th in the Mr. Universe contest, and rivaled Lex Luger or anyone else in our industry. He broke his neck at the same level I did, but he's in a wheelchair to this day. I will take credit for using all the skill sets and knowledge that I have, but I won't discount that only the grace of God allows me to be here.

Q: You often hear about people enduring these traumatic situations and then going into deep depressions afterward. Did you ever go through that?

A: I never did. I've always been a person of faith, though I haven't always implemented what I should. I felt there was a greater plan for me than I understood, and there were reasons why this ordeal didn't destroy me. Through my involvement with the Miami Project rehab program, I have seen so many heroes. It's inspiring to see people fight the good fight.

Q: After your accident, you were very accommodating to our publishing company. You even posed from your hospital bed, holding the *Wrestling 87* magazine with the famous shot of Nikita Koloff that read "I Cry For Magnum T.A." You also seemed to be doing what you could to help the Crockett company. Did you ever feel exploited?

A: If it happened in 2007, it definitely would have been handled differently. The Crocketts were good to me, treated me like family, so I wanted to do as much as I could for them.

Q: I remember the dramatic appearance you made at the Crockett Cup in 1987. What was that like for you?

A: It was the most overwhelming thing I've ever experienced. It was my first time back in the public light after the accident. It was a greater feeling than even a main-event match with Ric, Tully, or Nikita. Just being able to walk to the ring was a proud accomplishment. I knew those people genuinely cared about me as a person, not just as the character I portrayed. It's a life memory I'll never forget.

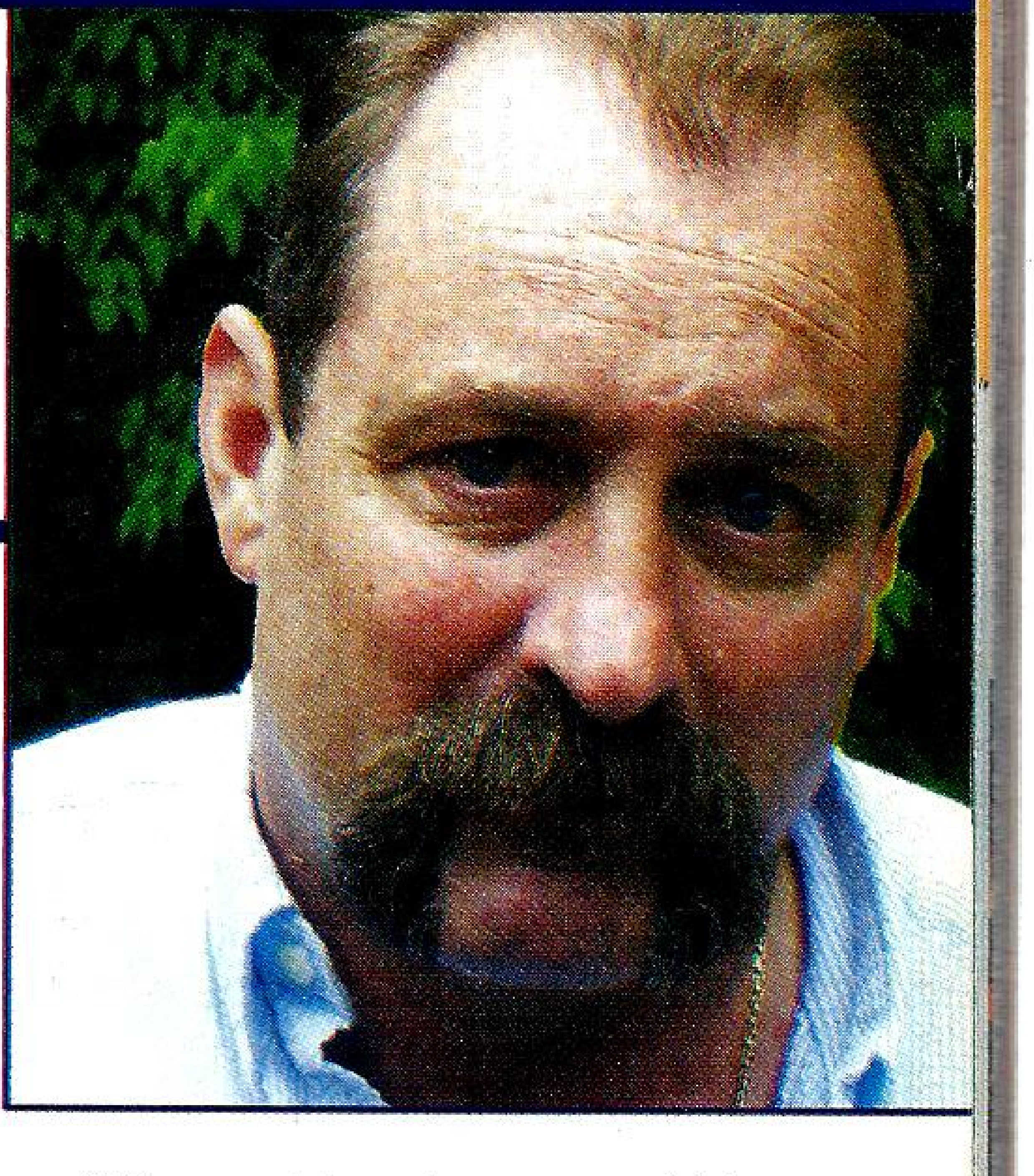
Q: Did you ever have any hope of returning to the ring?

A: I very quickly realized that my hope was just getting to a point where I could walk. People around me said those things, and I let some be somewhat patronizing, but I knew better. Back then and now, I put out more effort in an average day than I did in an hour broadway match with Ric Flair. That puts things in perspective for you.

Q: How do you feel today?

A: I feel beat up and worn out, like a lot of my contemporaries do. I've had this level of injury for 20 years, and I still have partial paralysis in certain muscles in my body. I appreciate the fact that I'm ambulatory and can walk without a cane or prosthetics. I've still got a severe limp and very little use of my right arm and hand. But I've learned how to adapt, and I'm

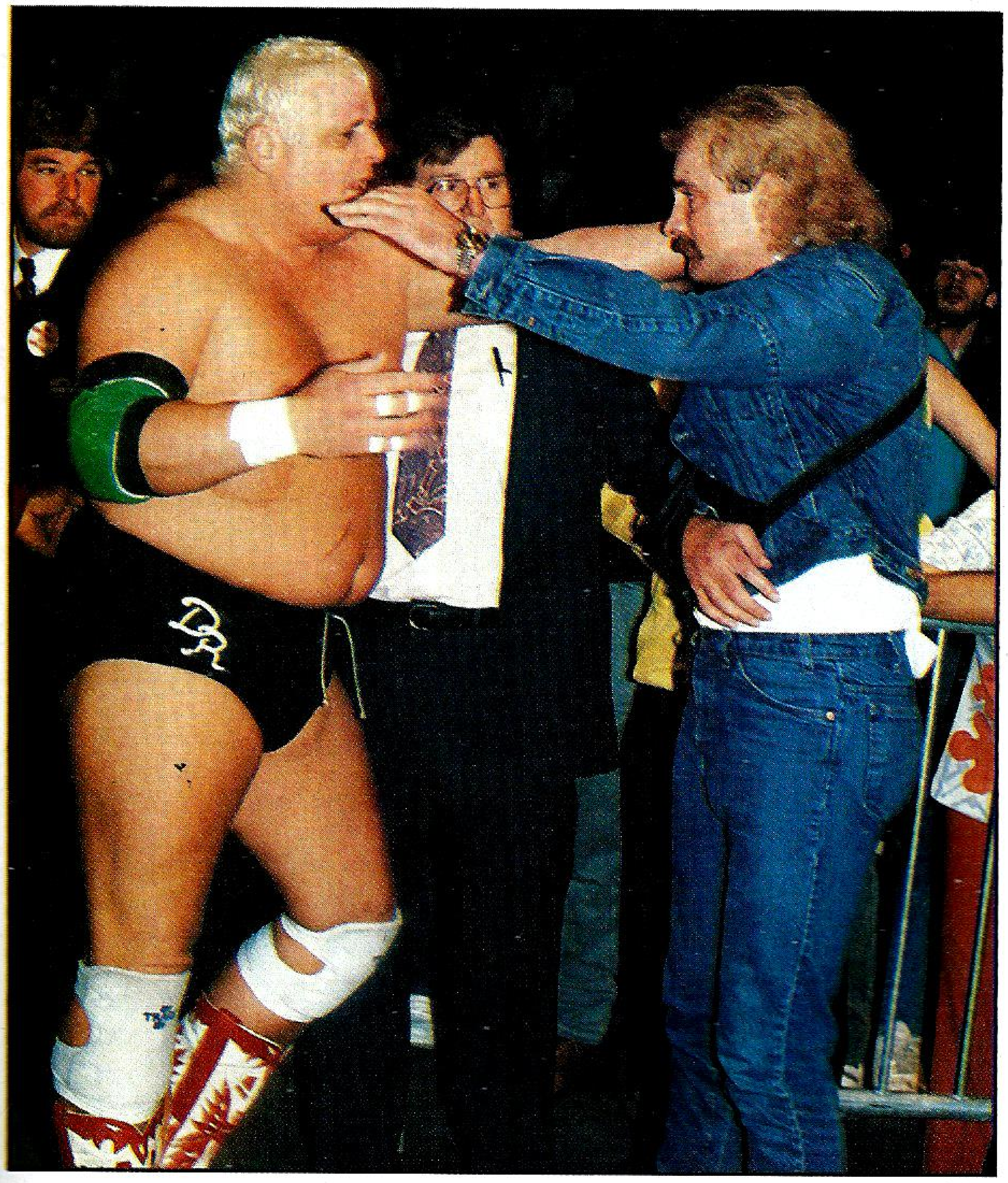
> **"I was loyal to Dusty because he was my friend, but if I had thought Vince McMahon's marketing machine and vision could have advanced my career, I might have taken that opportunity."**



very thankful for what I can do. I lost everything. Everything I got back is a plus. An athlete's expectations on his body are much higher than those of a normal person. Am I satisfied? No, I never will be satisfied with anything less that what I know I was capable of being. I'm thankful not to be confined to a wheelchair or have to be dependent on someone for my basic needs. That would be horrible. The pluses far outweigh the minuses right now.

Q: After your accident, a man called Sting came along and was put in your spot—and he went on to have a great career. Do you sometimes think, if not for your accident, Sting might not have had that chance?

A: I think there was so much potential for growth that guys like Sting and Lex Luger would have had a chance. See, I didn't know whether I was going to stay with the Crocketts. I was loyal to Dusty because he was my friend, but if I had thought Vince McMahon's marketing machine and vision could have advanced my career, I might have taken that opportunity. We saw how much money Steve Austin and The Rock made in later years, so my future might have been there. Jimmy was trying to do too much from within, and I didn't really think they'd be able to compete in the long run. If you put our live show against McMahon's live show in Philadelphia or Baltimore, we definitely had the better product. But that doesn't matter if your product isn't going out to as many potential viewers.



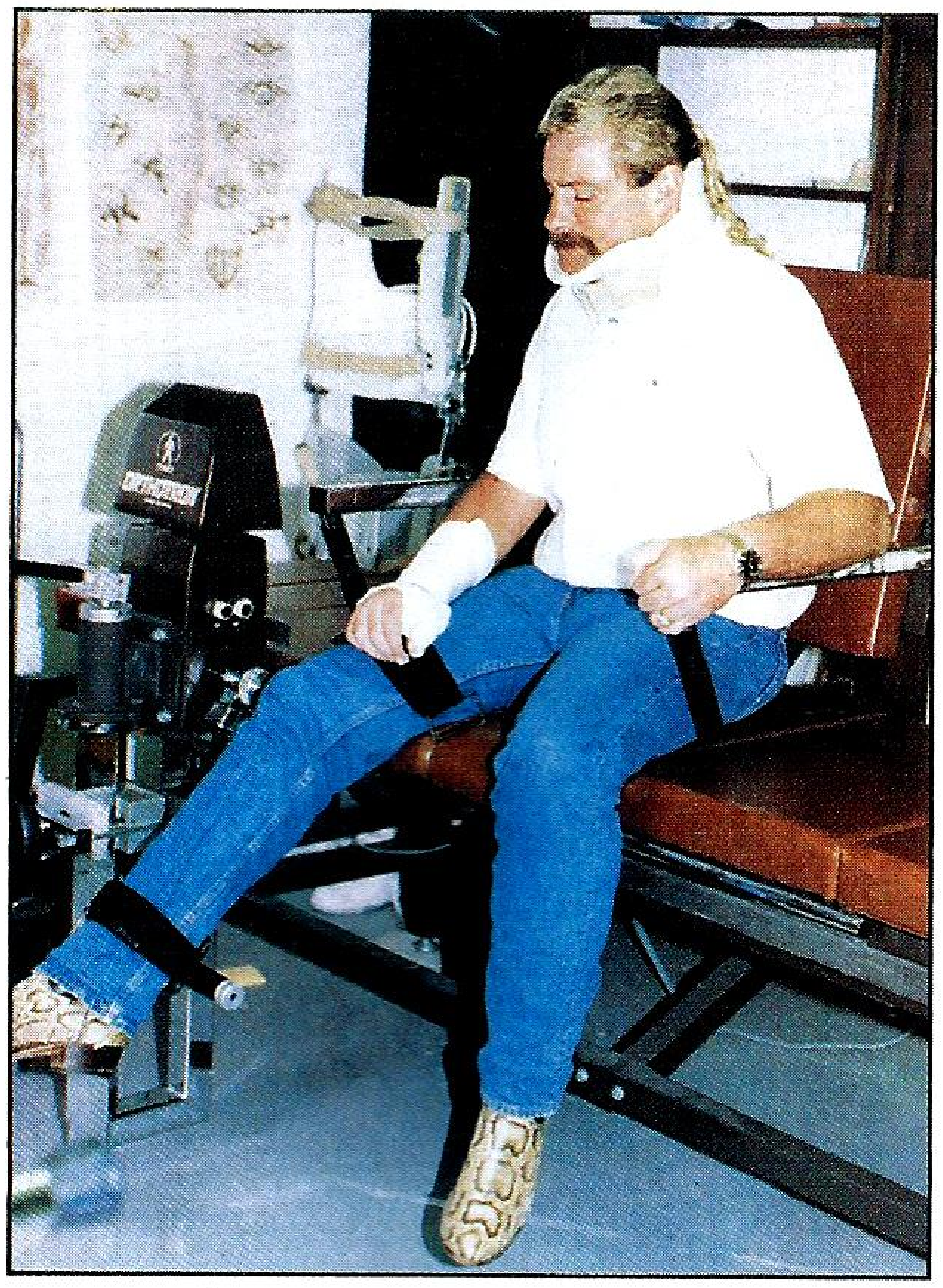
Six months after his accident, Magnum makes his first public appearance at the 1987 Jim Crockett Sr. Memorial Cup Tournament. Longtime friend and America's Team partner Dusty Rhodes was waiting with open arms.

Q: After all, the WWF had a cartoon show on CBS at the time.

A: Exactly. You can't compete against that kind of exposure. We took pride in the fact that our show was perceived as more of a shoot, while they were the Saturday morning cartoons.

Q: I remember that you returned to do some color commentary. Weren't you also involved in Crockett Promotions and WCW in a behind-the-scenes capacity?

A: I did a lot of color commentary



For years after his accident, Magnum continued intensive rehab to maximize the use of his body. Although Magnum still suffers from partial paralysis in muscles on his right side, he has come a long way since that rainy night in 1986.

with Jim Ross and did voiceovers for the UWF after Crockett bought it from Bill Watts. When Ted Turner bought WCW in 1988, Jim Herd was put in charge and Dusty left—and I was told that they no longer required my services. Not long after that, Dusty was brought back as the booker and Dusty wanted me as an assistant. I worked another two years for Turner Broadcasting as assistant talent coordinator and did more commentary work, too.

It was a tough place to be because I was still very young and working with guys who were making stupid money. They didn't think they needed direction because they were already making so much money. At 31, I should have been in my prime, not having to coerce people into doing what they were supposed to do.

Q: I can understand why that would be so frustrating. You were chomping at the bit to get back in the ring while those other guys took their good fortune for granted.

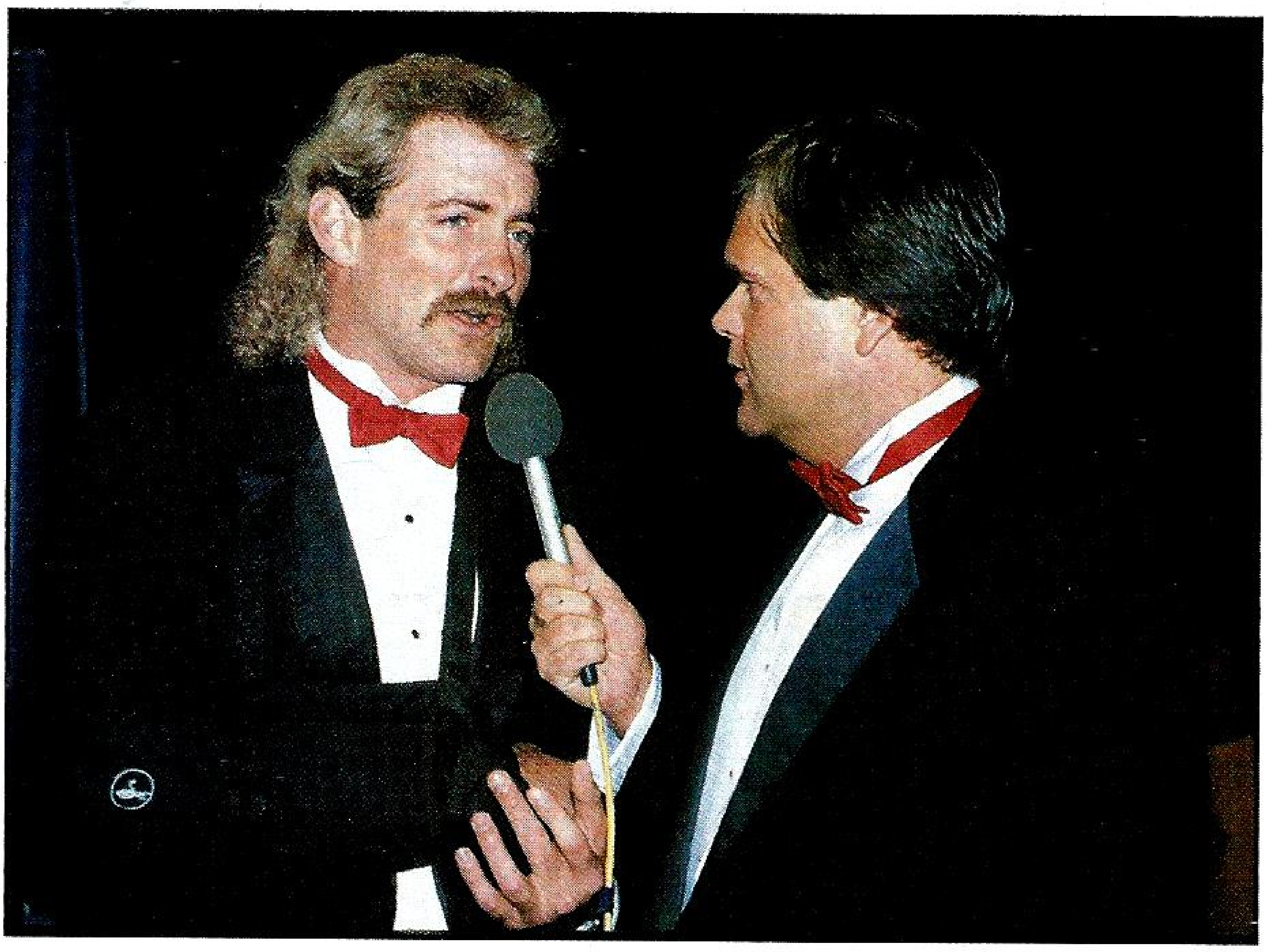
A: I was forced to communicate with a bunch of people who weren't appreciative of what they had. They wore out every strand of patience I had left. It was not the right place for me at the time. At 47 years old, though, I would have a different outlook. On the other hand, I had the opportunity to learn the dynamics of working in the corporate atmosphere of Turner Broadcasting. But, overall, it wasn't one of my fonder memories of what I did in the business.

Q: And then you went on to start your own business, right?

A: I got into the cellular communication construction business in 1995. An opportunity came available through an associate of mine. My father and his father had spent 30 years in steel construction and erection, so it was a natural business for me to pursue. It took on a life of its own over the past 12 years and provided for my family. I don't necessarily have a great passion for it, as I did for wrestling, but I don't know whether anything can replace that. The direct feedback from the fans made it a great profession.

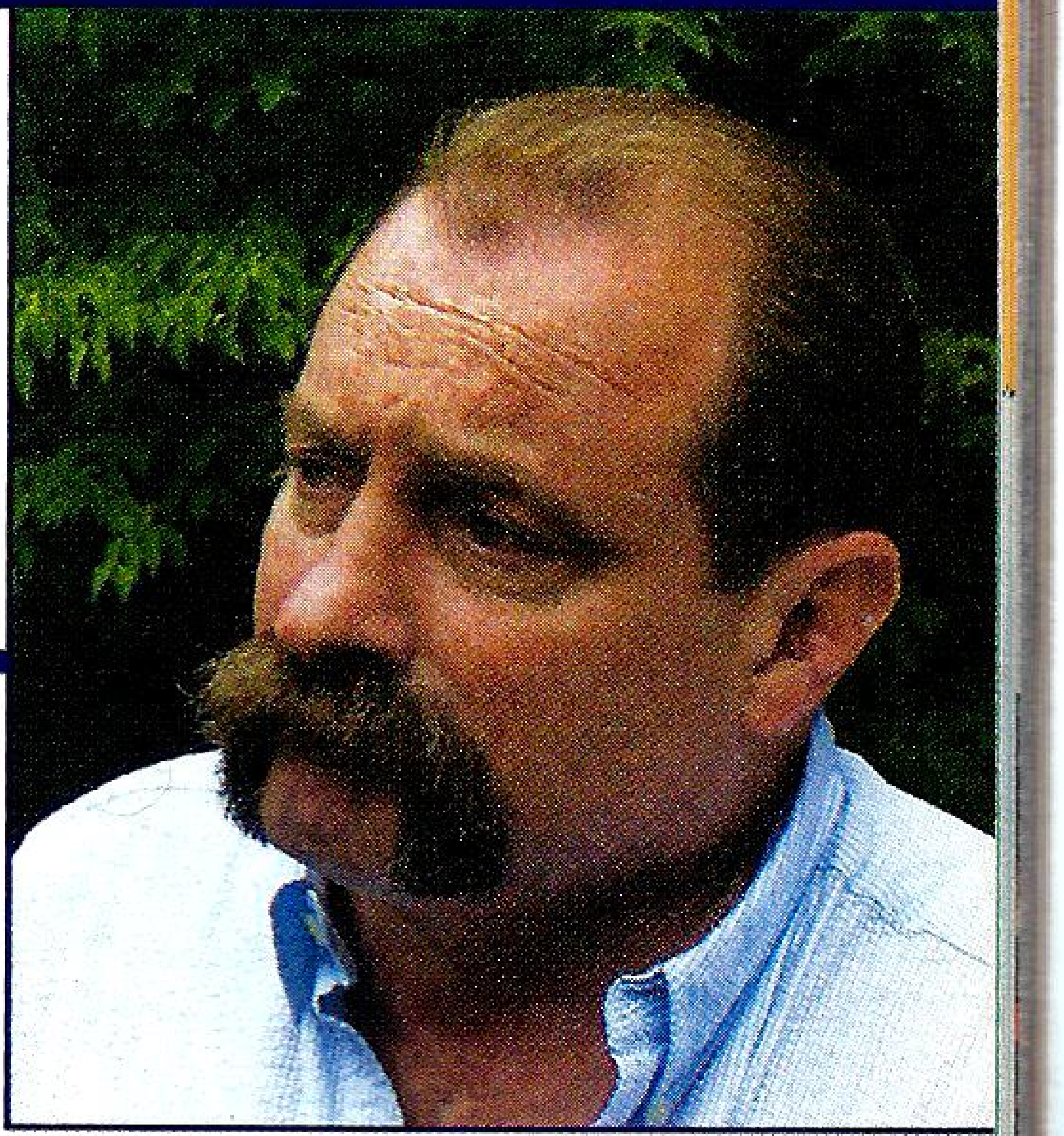
Then again, I feel for Ric Flair, one of the greatest of all-time, who hasn't found a graceful exit. We were blessed with jobs that we would have done for free, if we didn't have to eat. We got money and accolades, and got to be the center of attention in front of 5,000 or 10,000 people at a time. It was great.

Q: Of course, Flair isn't the only example of a wrestler who has had difficulty retiring when it was time. Whether it's Flair or Jerry Lawler, the same desire for the spotlight that made them such great



Magnum returned to wrestling as a color commentator for the Crockett-owned UWF. Although fans weren't able to see Magnum wrestle again, he provided insightful color commentary alongside play-by-play man Jim Ross.

> **It was such an honor to go out and portray this hero, but—until my accident—I didn't realize how many people were watching and who cared about me. All of a sudden, I had a real-life tragedy going on, and I realized this is what I would be remembered for.**



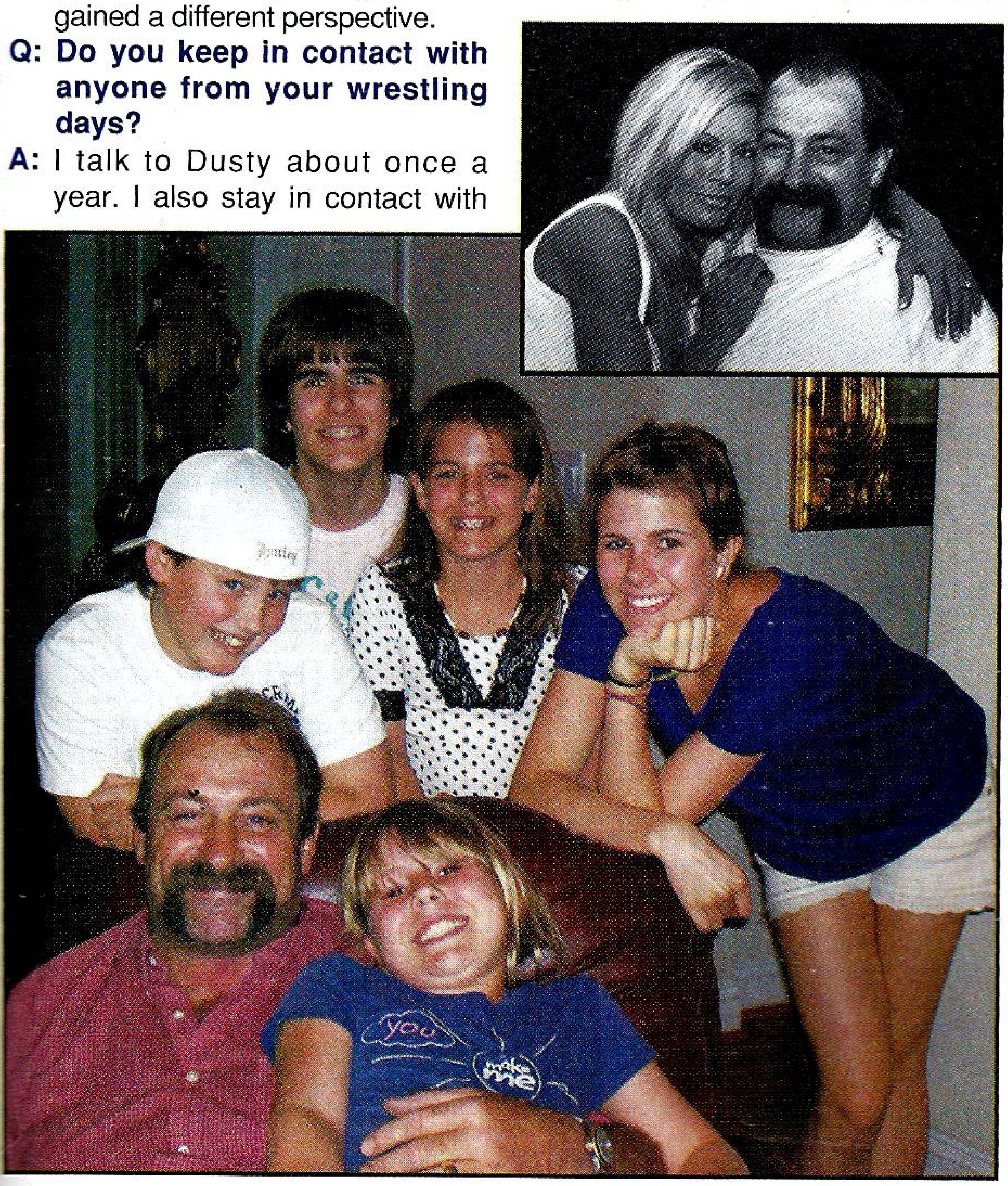
stars may be working against them at this point.

A: Life is about transitions. It's always about moving on to the next thing and evolving. I can't guarantee you that I would have done any better. Since I never got to be World heavyweight champion and never got the seven-figure annual income, I might have gained a different perspective.

Q: Do you keep in contact with anyone from your wrestling days?

A: I talk to Dusty about once a year. I also stay in contact with Barry Windham and Jimmy Garvin. And I usually bump into Ric Flair a couple of times a year here in Charlotte. Outside of that, it's sporadic, sometimes at legends shows. I always like to sit and reminisce a little.

Q: We talked about your wrestling character, being John Wayne on a Harley, and that was inspiring to a lot of people. But that didn't hold a candle to your real-life example, overcoming such a devastating accident. Do you think that your life has turned out to be more meaningful this way?



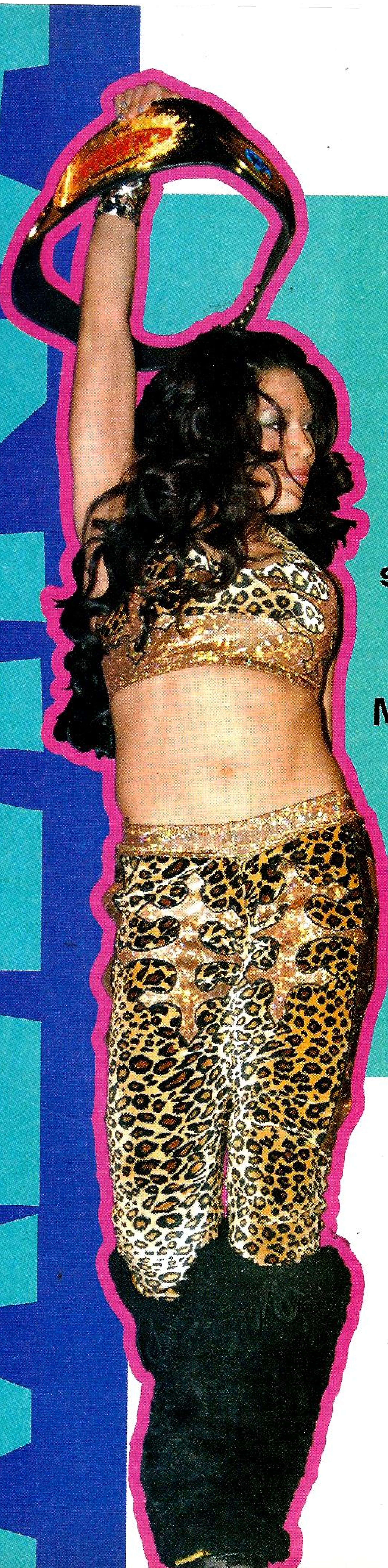
Away from wrestling, Magnum was forced to adapt to life without championship glory or the constant adulation of the fans. Today, his life revolves around his cellular tower construction business and his loving family. Magnum and his wife of two years, Courtney (inset), are expecting twins.

A: It was such an honor to go out and portray this hero, but—until my accident—I didn't realize how many people were watching and who cared about me. All of a sudden, I had a real-life tragedy going on, and I realized this is what I would be remembered for. Whatever influence I had on people, I wanted them to see that I wouldn't quit and would make the best out of a difficult situation.

Q: What final thought would you like to leave with our readers?

A: My story is one of overcoming. We all have our massive obstacles to overcome. I've made a bunch of mistakes over the past 20 years, but it's important to stick to your core principles and basic decency, especially during adversity. Mine would have been a hard-luck story if I had hit the pole, gone into a coma, and never came out of it, like James Dean. As it is, I'm surrounded by beautiful children, a loving wife, and caring parents. My life is full of blessings. ☐

MELINA



WWE Divas are in a constant struggle to become known as something other than sex objects, but women's champion Melina is determined to break through as the next respected female star—who also just so happens to be easy on the eyes

Photos by George Napolitano

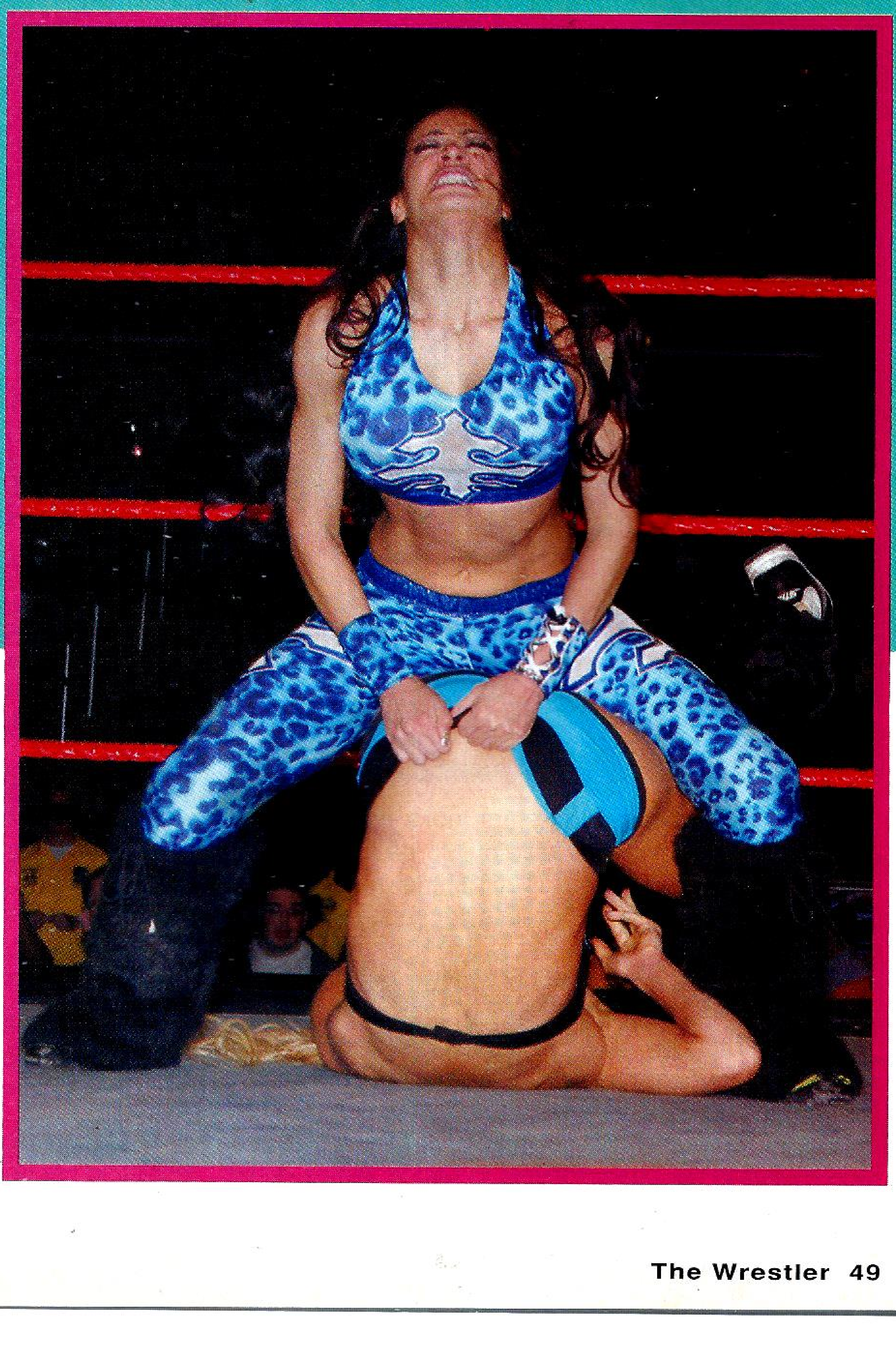
Too Beautiful To Be Taken Seriously?

By Al Castle

THEIR SHAPELY BODIES still glistening minutes after competing in a Memorial Day bikini battle royal that included the liberal use of water guns, several Divas laughed and toweled off as they huddled together backstage. Although there was only one winner among them—Michelle McCool—the mood remained light, as most of the ladies agreed, "It was all in good fun."

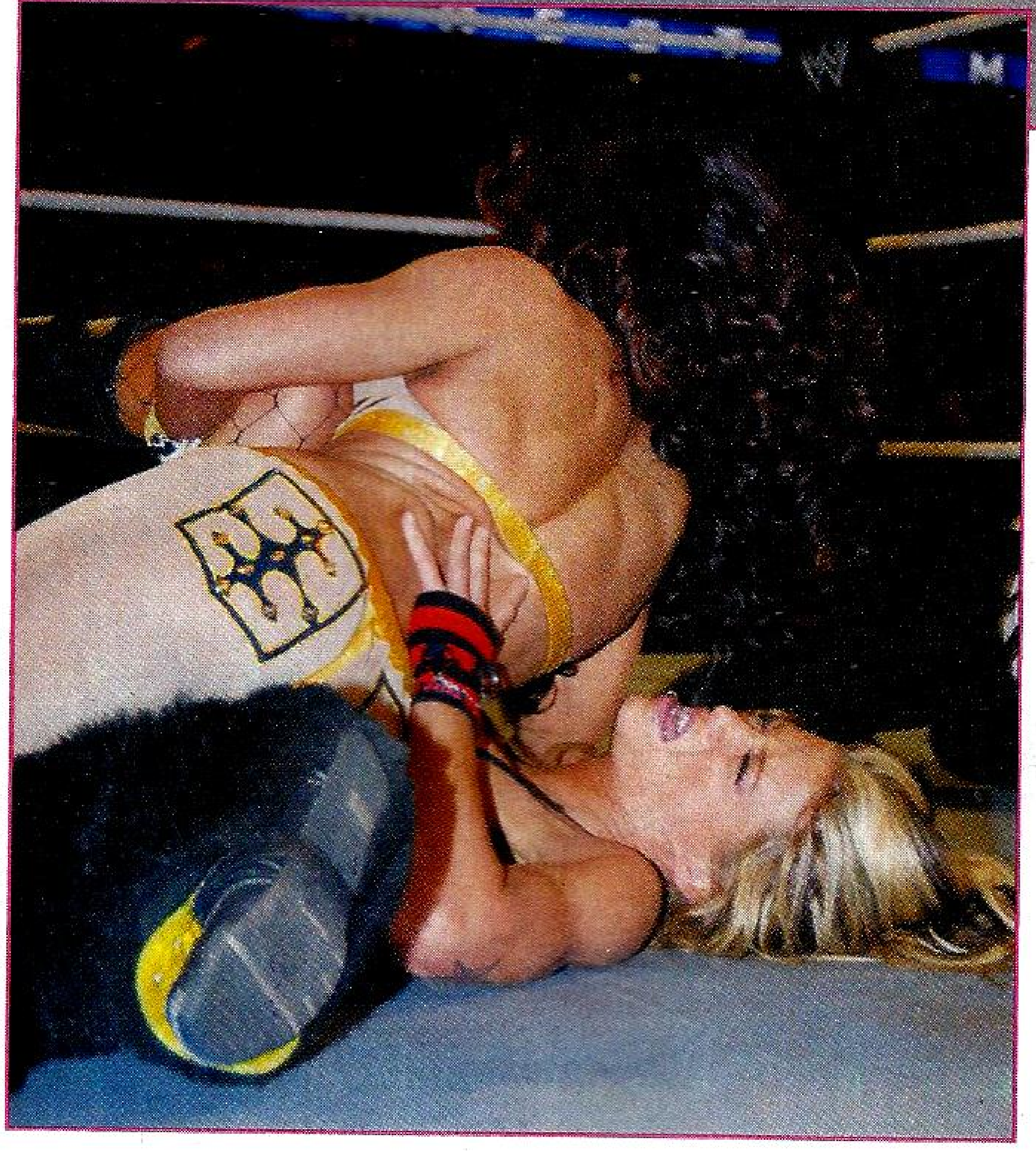
But like a storm cloud hovering on a sunny day, one woman shoved her way through the bubbly assembly, headed straight for her dressing room, and slammed the door as loud as a thunderclap. To WWE women's champion Melina, who was last eliminated in the battle royal, losing is never, ever "in good fun."

"I remember telling her, 'Lighten up, babe. You've still got your title. It's not like you lost a real match.' But she wasn't having it," said Melina's charge, Johnny Nitro, who tried to console her after the loss. "As far as she's concerned, she's in a totally different league than the rest of the Divas, so losing is just not acceptable. And you know what? She's right."



Melina is out to prove she is more than just another lingerie-donning WWE Diva. She intends to strip the women's division of its style-over-substance competitors, including Torrie Wilson.

WRESTLEMANIA
DETROIT 4.1.07
CSC EVENT STAFF



The red-hot Latina was a bit annoyed that Ashley Massaro received more attention for her *Playboy* cover than Melina did for her championship. Ashley tried to be aggressive during their feud (above), but, at WrestleMania, Melina showed the cover girl that it takes more than good looks to be a champion (left).

With her drop-dead gorgeous looks and sexy ring attire, it may be tempting to write off Melina as just another pretty face among the beautiful, if somewhat athletically limited, ladies of WWE. But despite her appearance, locker room observers say Melina is intent on making one thing clear: She is a professional wrestler first and a Diva second.

While her comely colleagues strut their stuff in music videos and on magazine covers, Melina has risen above her typecast to become one of the fiercest female competitors in some time. So determined is Melina that after recently losing her championship to Mickie James during a match in Paris, France, she rebounded to win back the title the very same night.

But with WWE having moved away from the athletically driven women's division of four or five years ago in favor of acts such as ECW's "Extreme Expose" and *Playboy* cover girls, some say Melina's toughest challenge may be getting noticed for anything other than her looks.

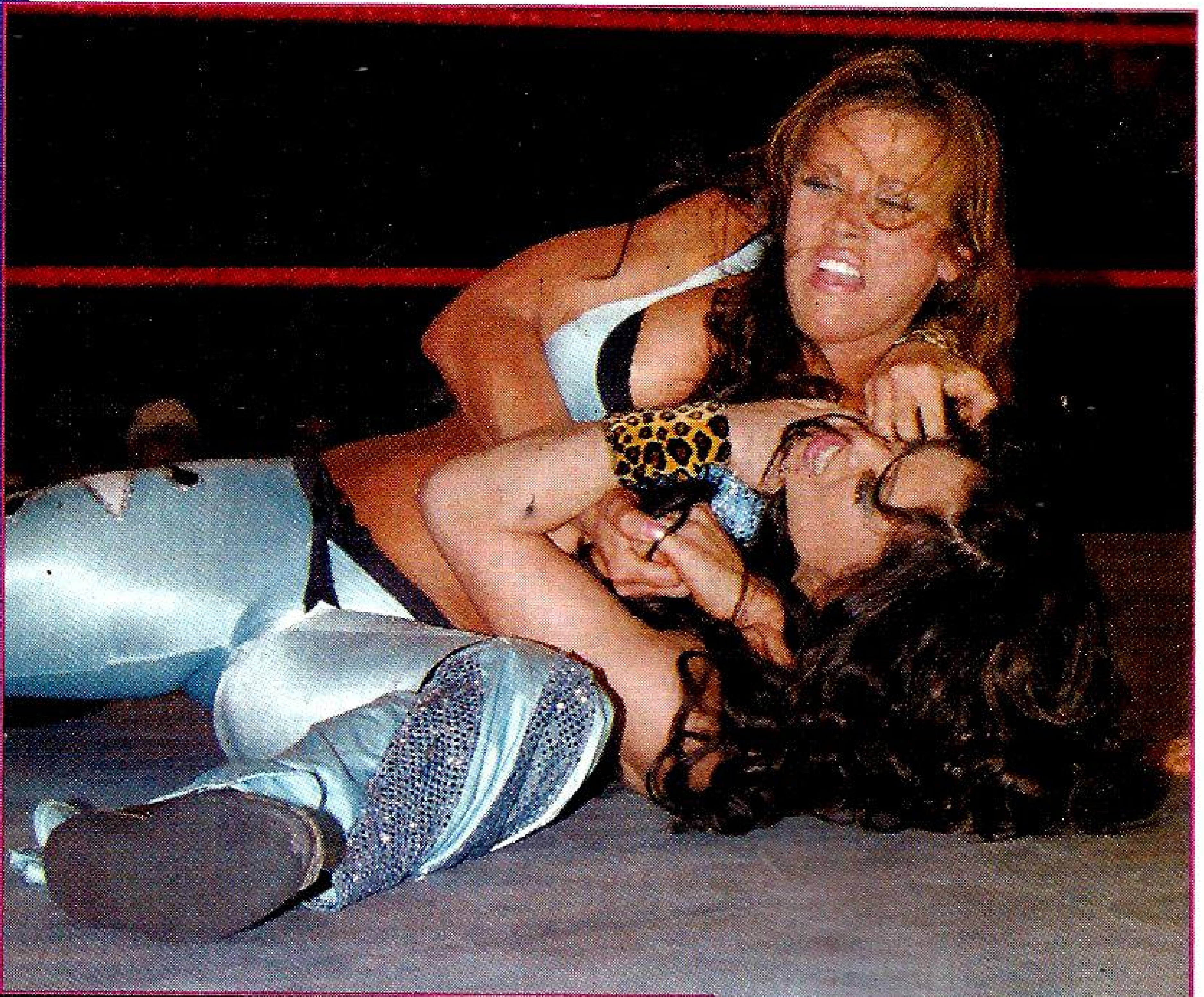
The days of Trish Stratus, Molly Holly, and Lita battling it out in hard-hitting, aggressive wrestling matches are long behind us. "It's a pity Melina wasn't in the mix back then," said Finlay, who is widely credited for WWE's resurgence of women's wrestling in the early-2000s, as he helped train several of the female competitors. "I think she could have hung in there with the toughest of those lassies."

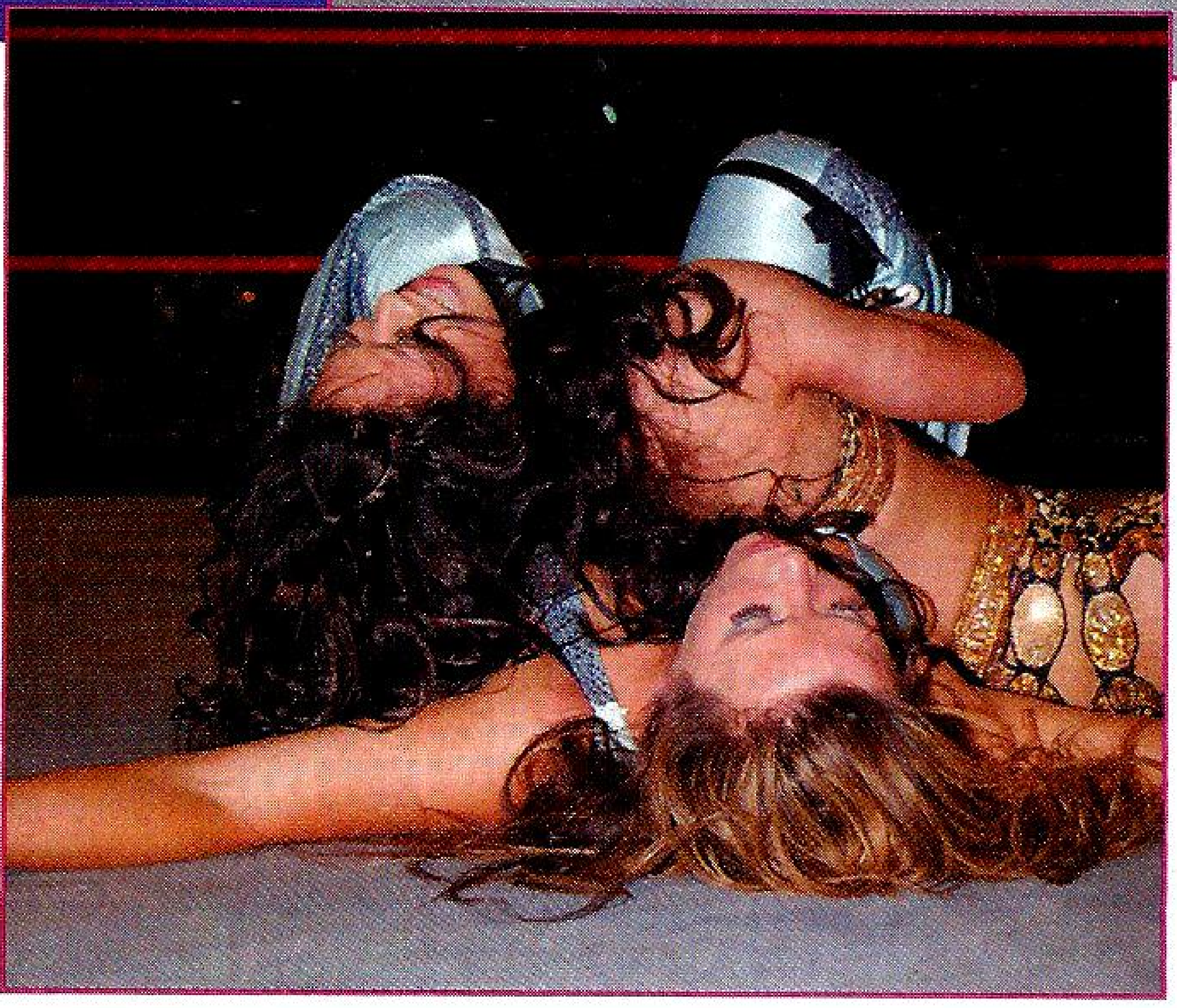
Although she made quite the first impression upon debuting in WWE as the manager of Johnny Nitro and Joey Mercury in April 2005, fans did not take notice of Melina's skills inside the squared circle until November of that year, when she challenged Trish Stratus for the women's title at Survivor Series.

Few fans thought the bout would be anything more than a mismatch between the athletically gifted Stratus and the newcomer, Melina. But, even in defeat, Melina proved she had more to offer fans than just a risqué ring entrance.

It wasn't until February 2007 that Melina finally achieved her goal of winning the WWE women's title. But

"DESPITE DEFEATING THE HIGHLY QUALIFIED MICKIE JAMES FOR THE TITLE, MELINA WAS VIEWED BY SOME AS A PAPER CHAMPION, REIGNING AS THE TOP FEMALE WRESTLER IN A RATHER SHALLOW POOL OF CONTENDERS."





While the talent pool in the women's division is pretty shallow, there are a few standouts, including former champion Mickie James, who battled strongly against Melina for her title at Backlash (above). But Melina's determination to hold on to the belt she fought so hard to claim was too much for James (left).

even then, the victory was bittersweet. Despite defeating the highly qualified James for the title, Melina was viewed by some as a paper champion, reigning as the top female wrestler in a rather shallow pool of contenders. After James and Victoria, most fans agree there is quite a drop-off in wrestling ability to women like Maria and Torrie Wilson.

Observers said that rather than basking in the thrill of getting to defend her title before 80,103 fans in Detroit at WrestleMania 23, Melina was humiliated over being pitted against the inexperienced 2005 "Diva Search" winner Ashley Massaro. She made quick work of Ashley, but—again—returned to the locker room fuming over being upstaged by the popular *Playboy* cover girl.

Mick Foley, who wrote at length about his close friendship with Melina in his book *The Hardcore Diaries*, said the stunning WWE starlet has always been torn about the role of the WWE Divas as sex symbols.

"She knows sex is part of the job, and she knows the value of beauty in disarming people. But, as stunning as she is, Melina takes offense to anyone she believes is using WWE as a stage to show off their looks," Foley told THE WRESTLER. "I think part of her really likes having the eyes of millions of men fixed on her. But she doesn't think it's worth being lumped in the same category as girls who would rather appear in *Playboy* and *Dancing With The Stars* than win a wrestling match."

Still, some Divas say if Melina wants credibility, she needs to start earning it—and quit making excuses.

"Believe me, I know what she's going through," said Trish Stratus, recently speaking by telephone during a break in filming a new television program. "Years before I was getting any respect as a wrestler, I was barking like a dog in the ring in my bra and panties. But later I learned that the only way to get fans to see past my looks was to go out there every night and wrestle my butt off, whether it was against Chyna or Stacy Keibler. It doesn't matter who you're opponent is, you always have to be at *your* personal best."

And despite a relatively thin roster of female wrestlers, there are plenty of up-and-coming challengers just waiting for Melina to underestimate them and drop her guard.

"I get pretty sick and tired of Melina going on about how much better she is than the rest of us. If she's so great, she shouldn't have a problem giving me another title shot," said rising star Candice Michelle, who has been honing her ring skills with hopes of a championship reign someday. "I know the fans would always rather see us wearing next to nothing, but all us Divas have our eye on one particular fashion accessory—a gold belt." □

RE-INTRODUCING!

Looking Back At Our First Looks At 15 Top Stars

Section compiled by Dave Lenker

SOMETIMES YOU GET a Triple-H ... sometimes you get a Drake Debonair.

Who is Drake Debonair? What, you don't remember the "Dashing One" of WWWA fame from 1994? Well, that's kind of the point.

The people whose names have appeared in the staff box of this and other London Publishing-produced wrestling titles over the years have attended a lot of matches, read a lot of reports from promoters, photographers, and correspondents, and watched plenty of videotape of matches from coast to coast and one side of the world clear across to the other.

We think we're pretty good at spotting wrestling talent on the rise. That's where "Introducing" comes in. We don't take the selection of the athletes to be featured in that coveted two-page spread lightly. We attempt to present men and women who we think have a chance to be stars of tomorrow. That doesn't always mean selecting a wrestler who has just signed a WWE developmental deal. It involves scouring the independents in search of wrestlers who might have a shot making it big in a year ... or five years.

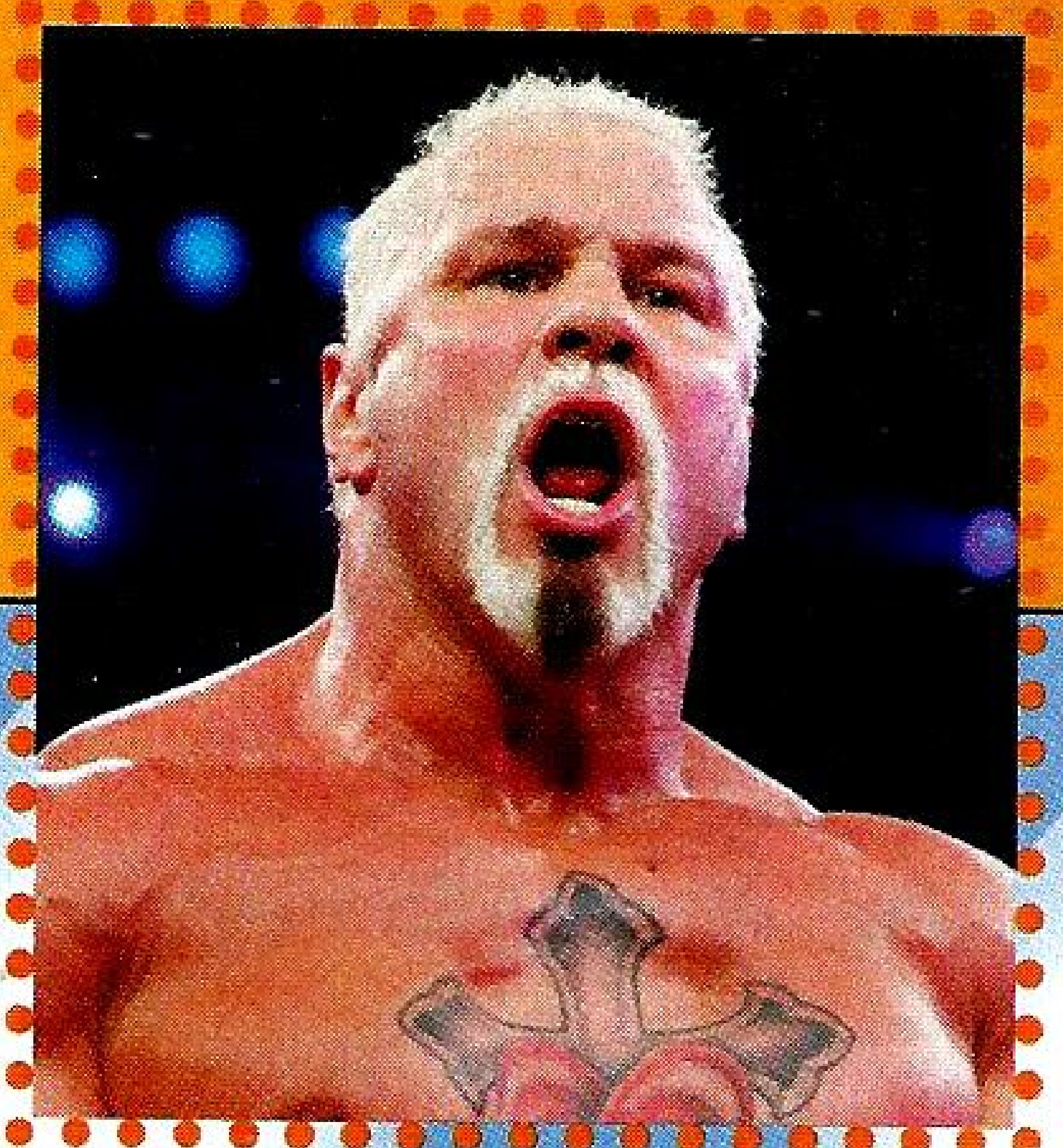
But just like the NFL general manager with the top pick in the draft—a chance to choose from every college football star in the country who has made himself available—we blow it from time to time.

There simply are no guarantees. Any number of things can happen to derail a promising up-and-comer's career. Sometimes, quite frankly, youngsters we feature in "Introducing" just aren't as good as we originally thought.

Still, we think our track record is pretty good. We also think you'll enjoy what you see and read in this special section. We've chosen 15 stars who were featured in "Introducing" during the years 1988 to 2001 and looked at how we presented them to you, in most cases, for the first time. Many of these guys were barely mentioned in our magazines other than a passing reference in "Names Makin' News" or a few listings in *PWI*'s "Arena Reports" before we gave them their first feature article.

It's fun to see what these soon-to-be-stars looked like back in the day, what their goals were, and what stories they had to tell (wait until you read Mahoney's—from his days as Abbudah Singh). We've summarized what we wrote then, included a memorable quote from each star's feature, recounted what each man's big break was (in some cases, it happened before we ever introduced him), and asked a member of our staff at the time to offer some first impressions of the star (you know, we just got the feeling that Terra Ryzing—the future Triple-H—was going to marry into the McMahon family someday).

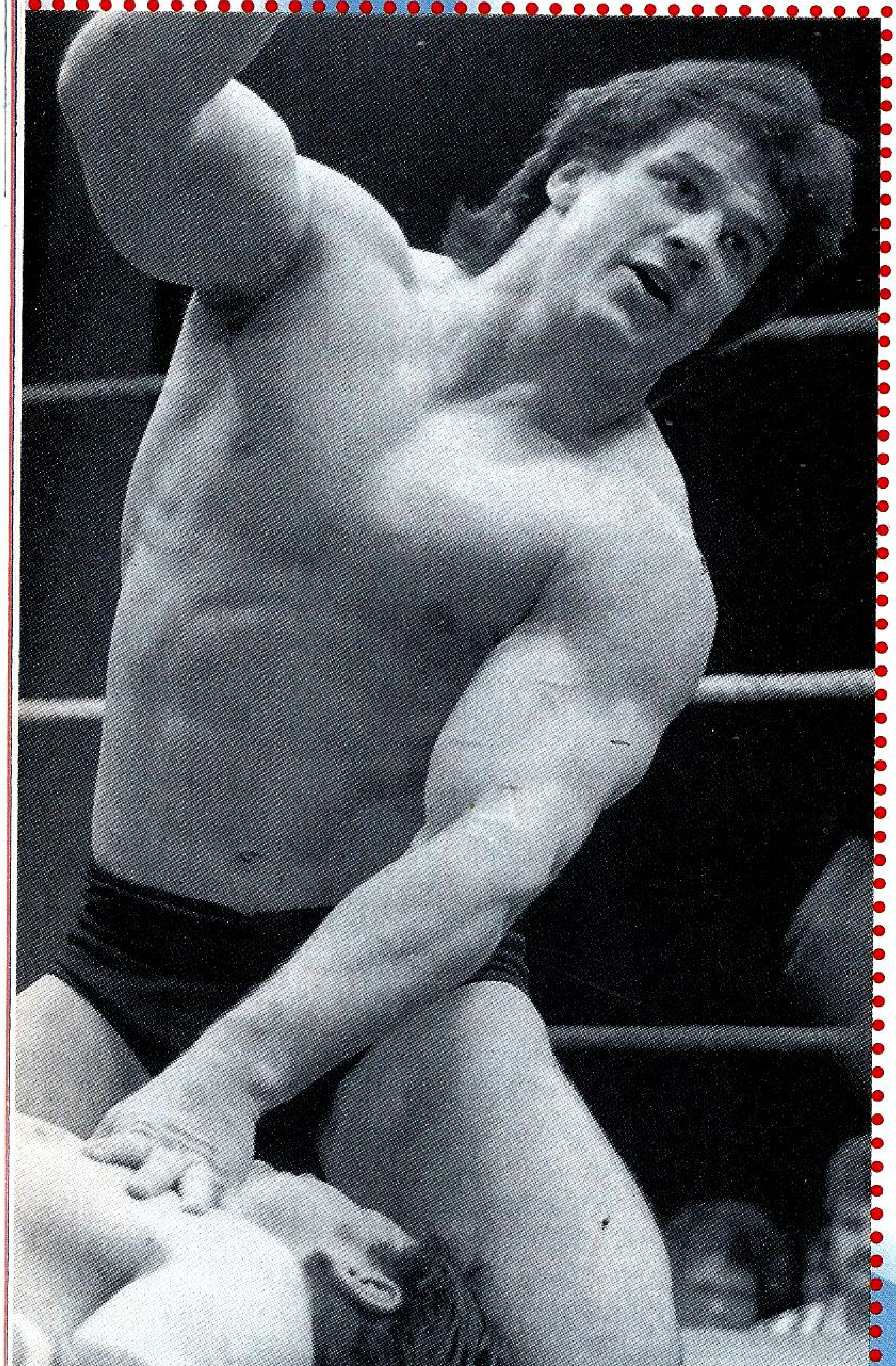
We hope you enjoy this unusual retrospective, and, sorry, all you Drake Debonair fans, your hero didn't make the cut.



SCOTT STEINER

[SCOTT REXSTEINER]

(April 1988 issue)



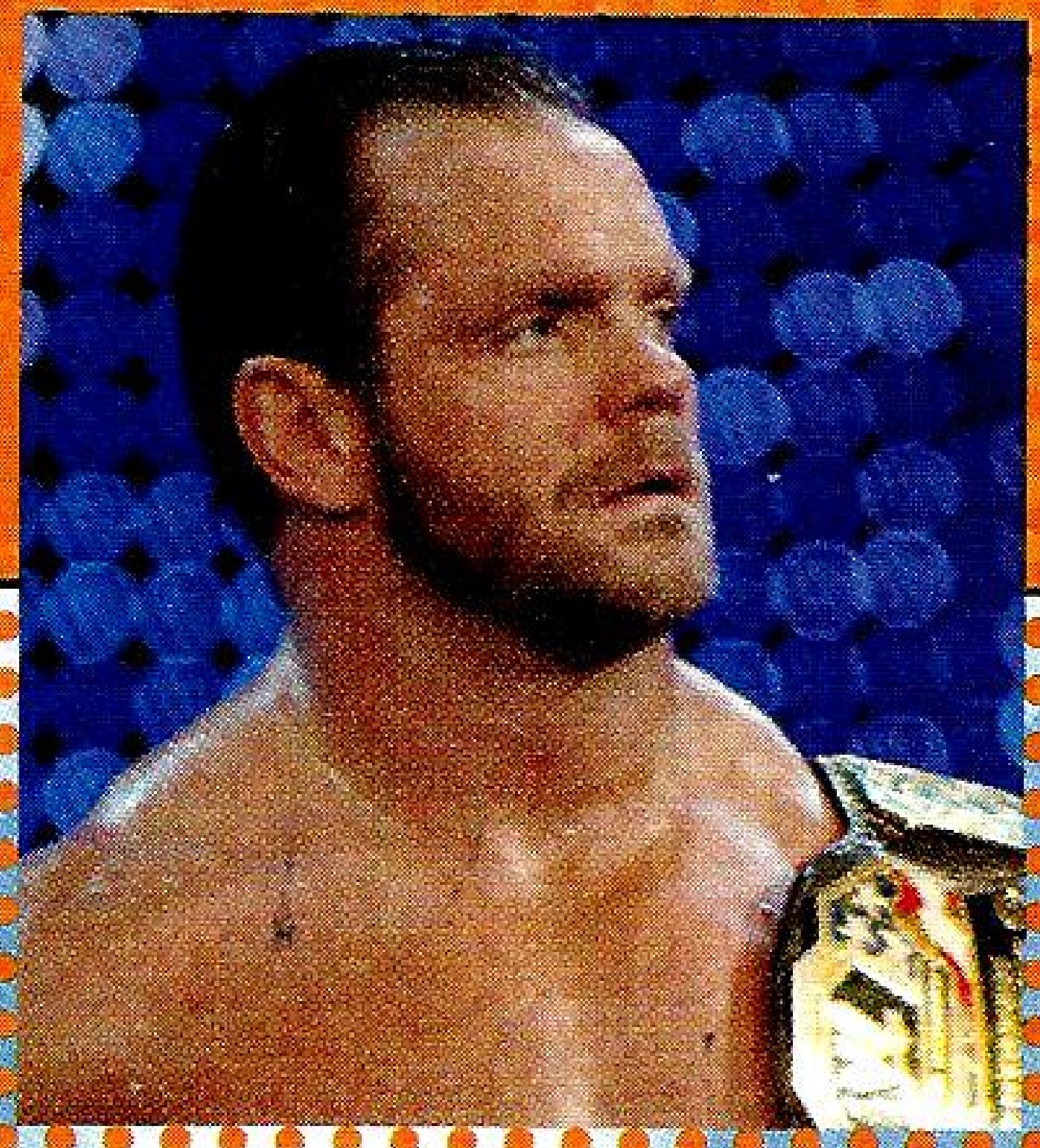
SYNOPSIS: It wasn't exactly Goldberg-like success right out of the chute for Scott Rexsteiner (as he was known professionally at the outset of his career), but it was reasonably impressive. As we noted at the time, he had "barely a half-dozen preliminary bouts under his belt" when he stunned The Great Wojo for the World Wrestling Association heavyweight title 21 summers ago. However, he also had extensive amateur experience at the University of Michigan—at which he was an all-American and earned 125 victories—and made great use of those skills in turning back numerous challenges from Chris Carter before Wojo regained the gold in a loser-leaves-the-WWA bout. But the popular Bay City, Michigan, native soon returned as the masked Señor X, only to be unmasked by Carter and then reinstated by WWA management. He soon added the WWA tag title to his resume. Scott had an odd relationship with older brother, Rick, at the time. He didn't like to talk about their relationship publicly (Rick was one of the UWF's top heels at the time), though he was occasionally spotted backstage with his brother at various shows.

MEMORABLE QUOTE: "I felt like I had just won a world championship. I have to admit, I think I caught Wojo by surprise because he came into the ring expecting to beat me easily. He was shocked when he saw I could wrestle."

BIG BREAK: It took the better part of three years for the brothers to work out whatever differences they had. Scott left the Memphis-based CWA in early-1989 after a nice run there and began teaming with Rick in the NWA. They were NWA World tag champs by November. Smart career move.

IN HINDSIGHT: "When I first saw Scott Steiner before doing this 'Introducing,' he looked like the prototype of a wrestler of the future. Great scientific skills, powerful, muscular body—you definitely saw where he had the potential to be one of the top stars of the 1990s. Obviously, he went the tag team route for most of his career and was one of the best ever. It wasn't until he became almost exclusively a power-based brawler who was known best for his mouth and his muscles that he finally won a world championship. I didn't see that coming.

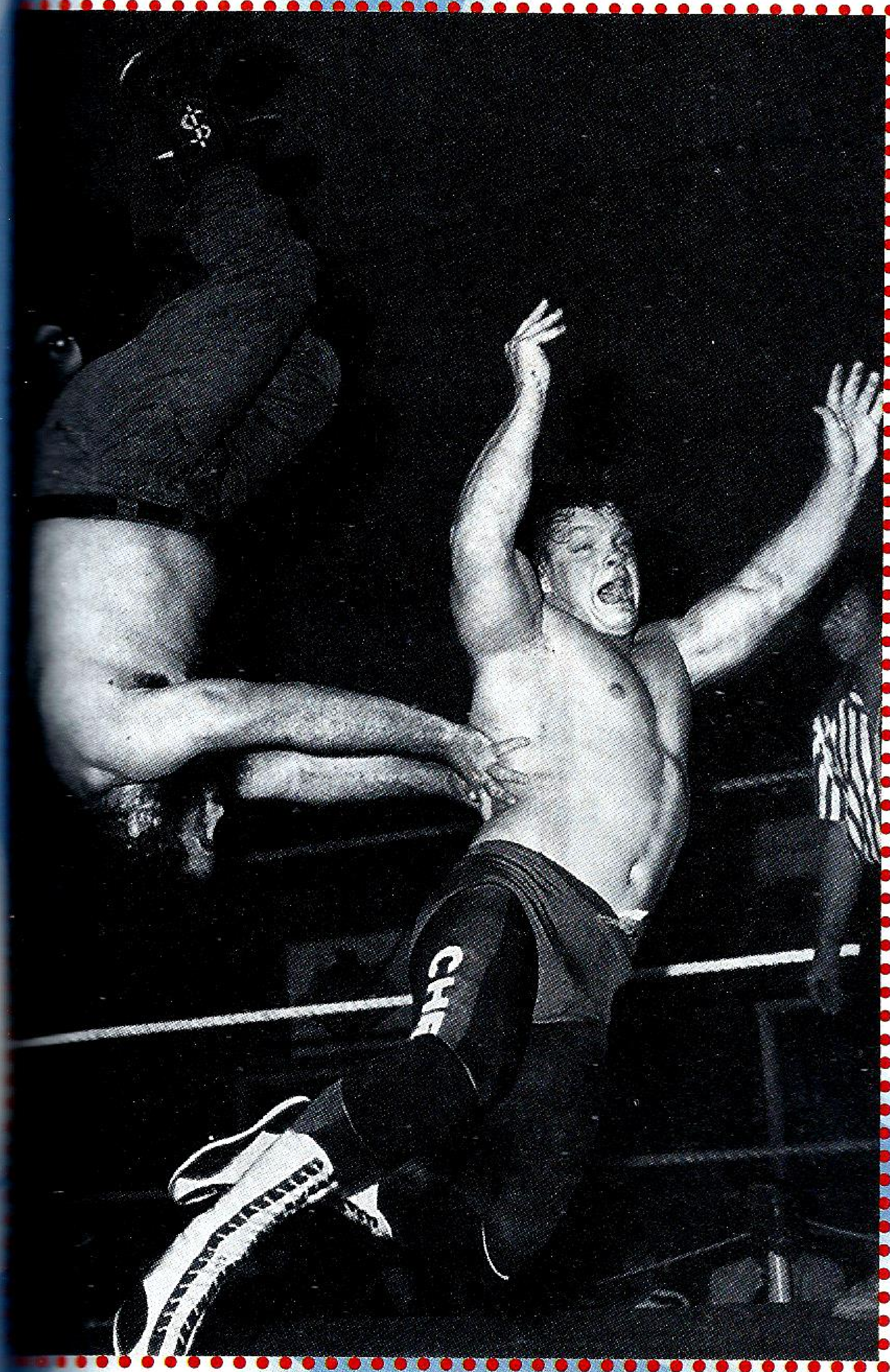
—Dave Rosenbaum



CHRIS BENOIT

(October 1988 issue)

SYNOPSIS: This was an "Introducing" that clearly focused on the positives and glossed over the negative that still dogs Chris Benoit to this day. It was obvious to anyone who watched him even two decades ago that he was an outstanding all-around wrestler. And that was what counted most in Stampede Wrestling, land of the Harts. The fact that he wasn't the most charismatic wrestler or the greatest of talkers wasn't so important. Benoit spoke at the time about how fortunate he was that his successful tag team with Johnny Smith imploded. Their falling-out allowed him to forge out on his own and thrive in Calgary, as he twice captured the British Commonwealth championship. Benoit had played football, baseball, and soccer as a youngster, but wrestling was always his first love; he showed that by attending any and every card he could from the age of 10. And he was serious from the start about wanting to "maximize my potential" and "travel the world and take on the best wrestlers in the sport," as he trained in New Japan for a year before turning pro. To be the best, he needed to be trained by the best—on two continents.

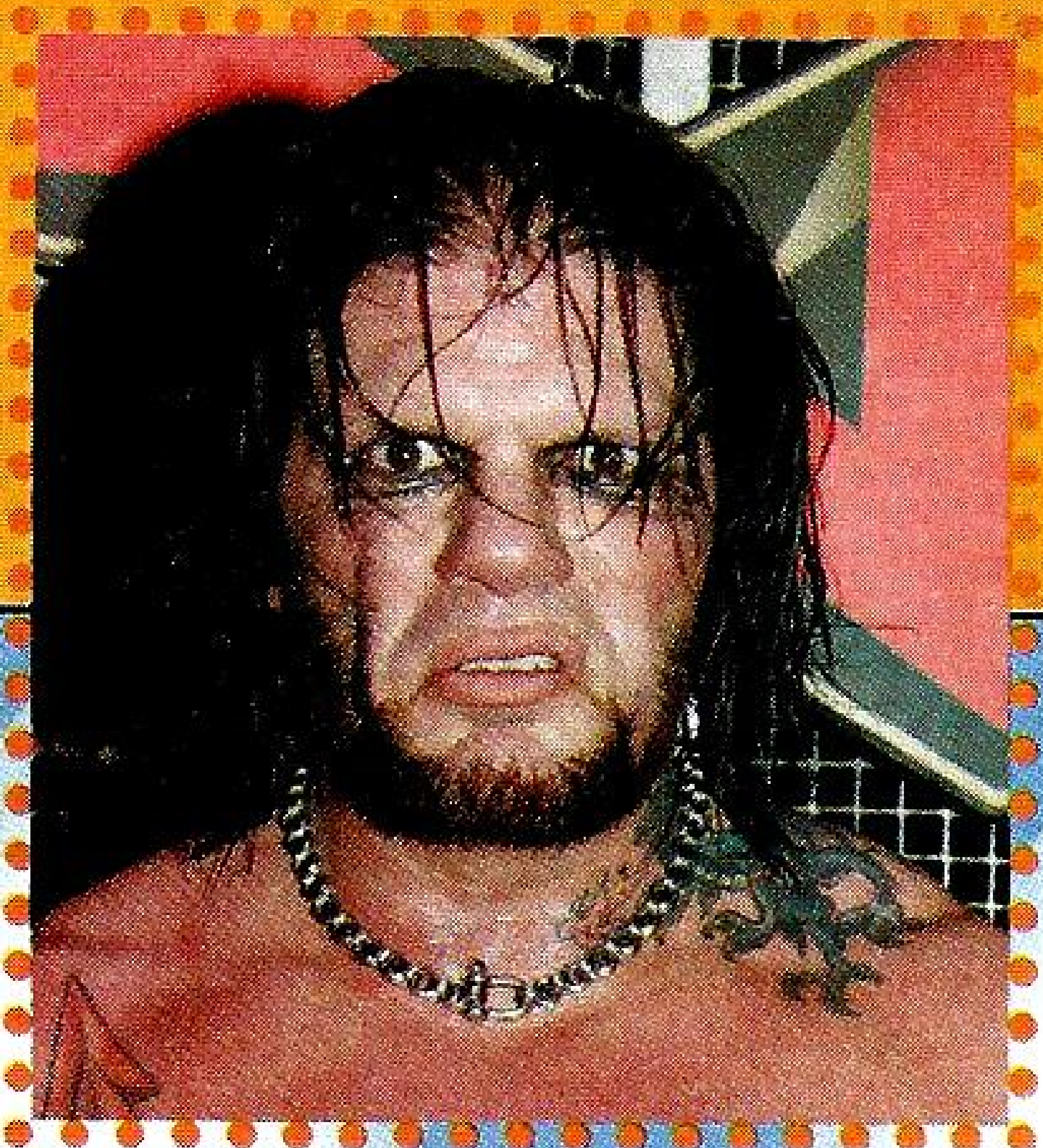


MEMORABLE QUOTE: "To this day, I've never seen a family that knows more about wrestling. [The Harts] really put me through my paces, but I don't think a young wrestler can get a better education anywhere."

BIG BREAK: For nearly a decade, no promoter could figure out how to maximize Benoit's potential. Enter Paul Heyman, the mad genius behind ECW. He made the ultra-intense and ultra-talented Canadian one of the cornerstones of his promotion in the mid-1990s. Benoit earned his "Crippler" nickname in ECW by breaking Sabu's neck. Soon, Eric Bischoff and WCW took notice and, eventually, so did Vince McMahon.

IN HINDSIGHT: "I do remember when we first got a look at Benoit and did this feature on him. I'd be lying if I said I saw world champion potential in him at the time, but I didn't see it in Bret Hart, either. Fortunately, this sport is always changing and evolving, and it changed for the better when it allowed Benoit to be crowned as Raw World champion at WrestleMania, and a very credible champion at that."

—Stu Saks

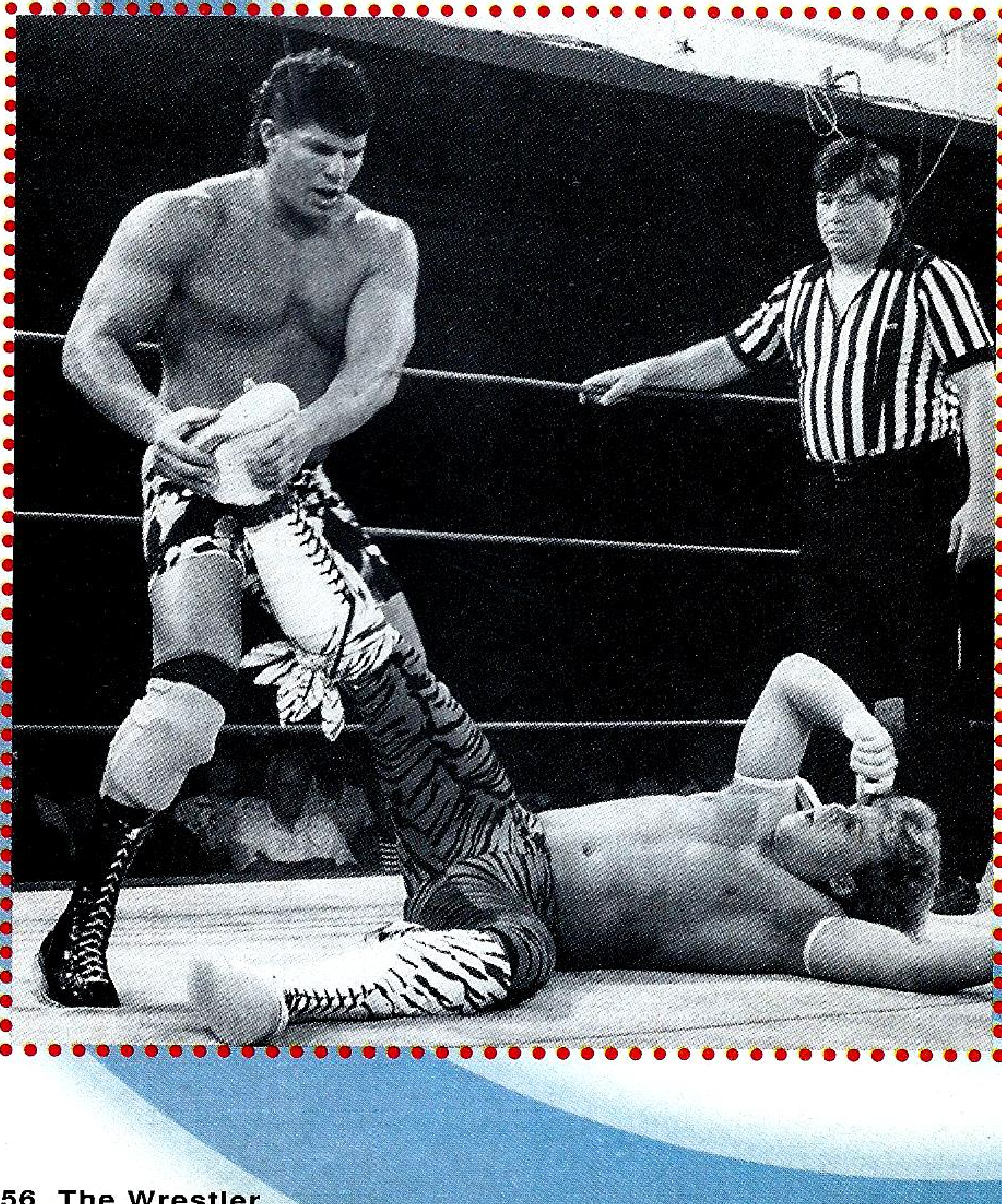


RAVEN

SCOTTY THE BODY

(November 1989 issue)

SYNOPSIS: Flamboyant ... spoiled ... outrageous? Yes, this is the guy we've known so well as Raven for the past decade. The morose ... brooding ... enigmatic Raven? Yep, he was quite the showman early in his career in Tennessee, Florida, and later the Pacific Northwest. He loved flashy clothes and bragged about his father's wealth, but he was hardly stupid, having earned degrees in criminal justice and psychology (that would come in handy later). He had already held the Florida TV title for nearly a year by the time he was introduced to readers of The Wrestler. In addition to his big feud with Carl Styles (distant cousin of A.J., perhaps?), Scotty also captured the Pacific Northwest Wrestling tag title with Top Gun and showed off his verbal skills by doing color commentary on PNW TV. He hasn't ended up as "the biggest star this sport has ever seen," as he predicted, but he has done well in several different personas.

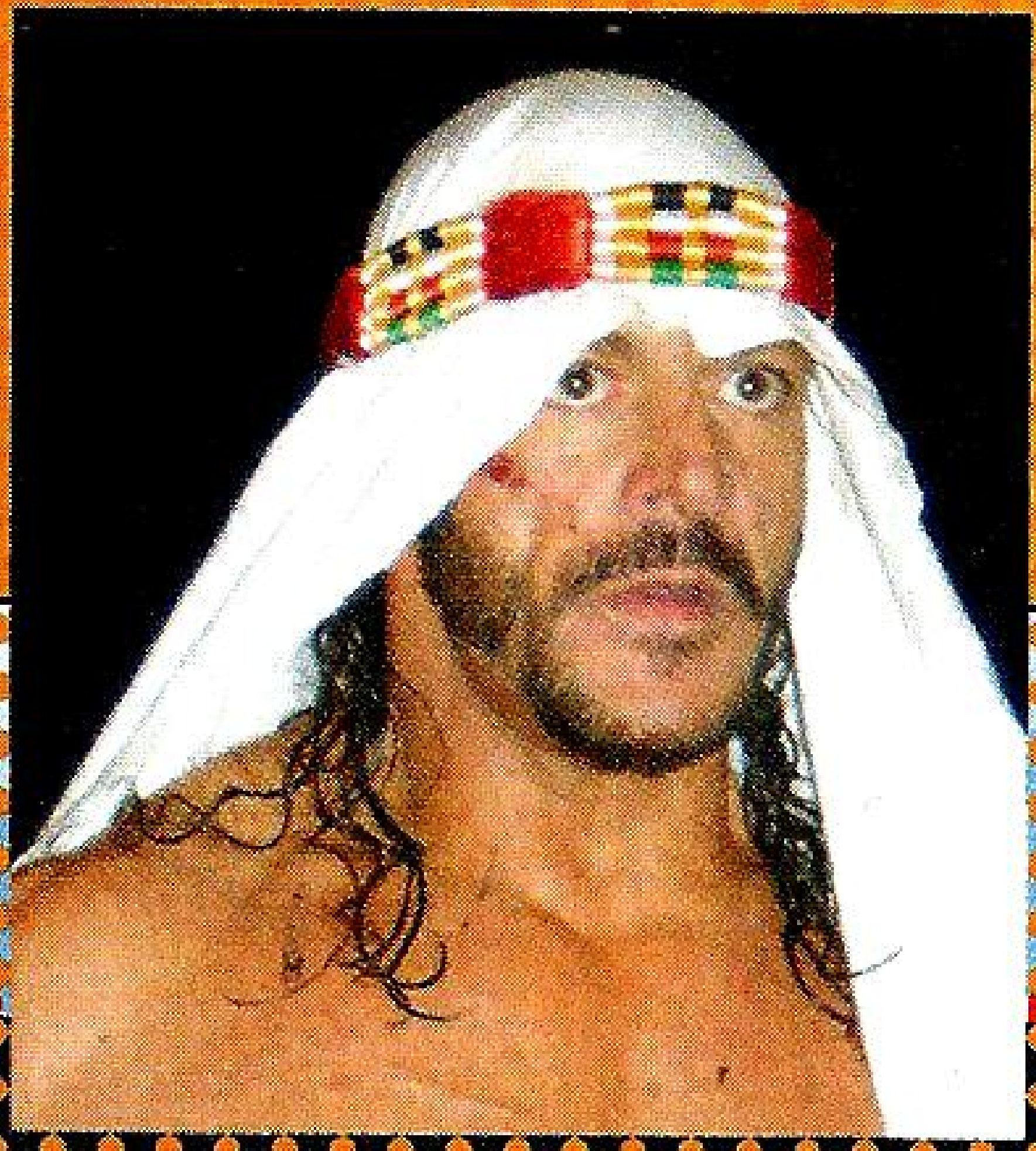


MEMORABLE QUOTE: "I can't help it that I come from a white-collar, affluent family. All of my clothes come from the finest shops. When I'm in Beverly Hills, I shop on Rodeo Drive. Why would I settle for anything less?"

BIG BREAK: It wasn't until he morphed into Raven in ECW that he really began to thrive, but the first big break came when he got to show everybody he had a lot of substance to go with his style as a key part of WCW's light heavyweight division in the early-1990s as Scotty Flamingo and won the gold in 1992. Hard to believe he was once known as a fine scientific wrestler.

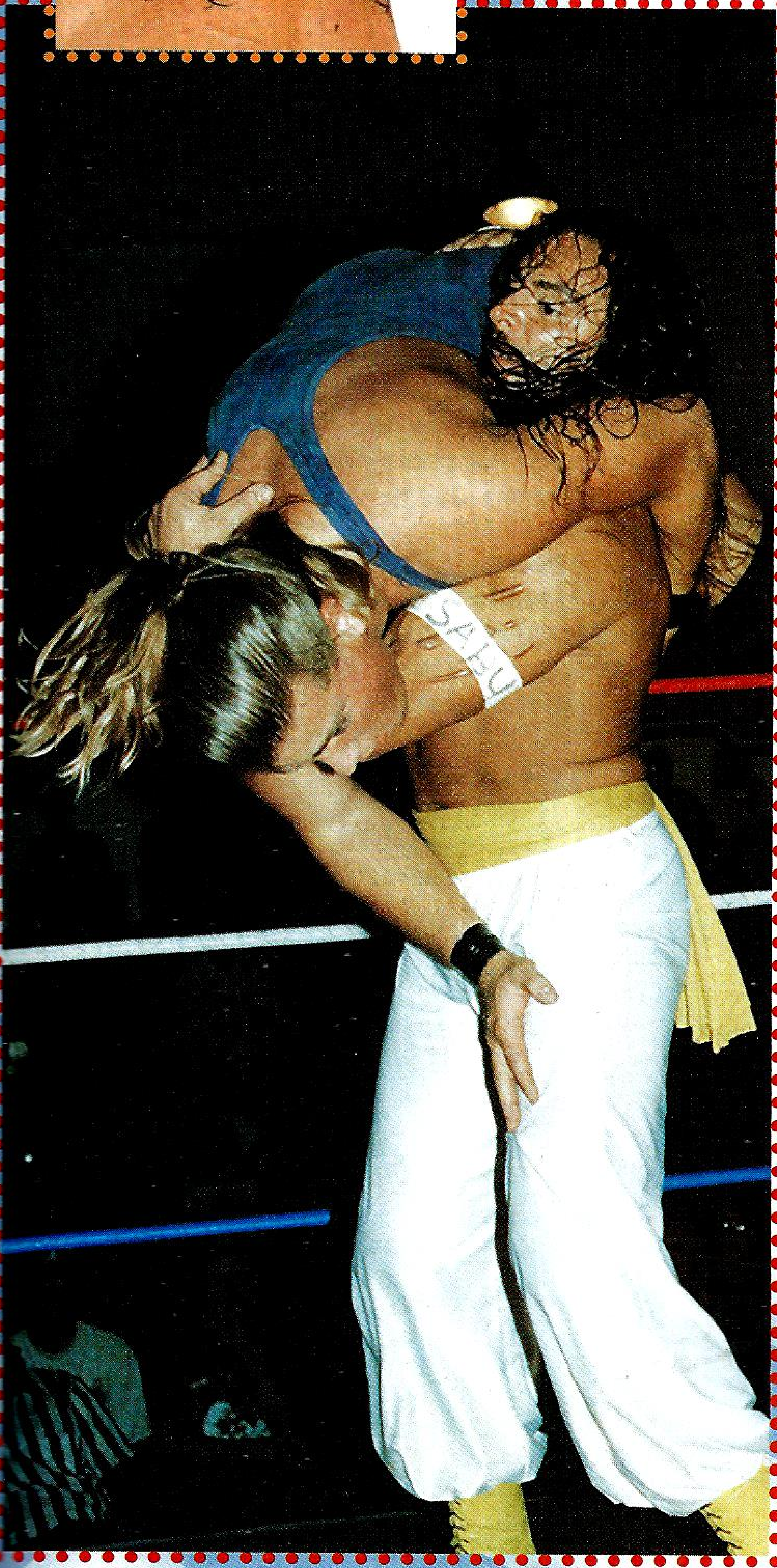
IN HINDSIGHT: "Scotty the Body or Raven or whoever just seemed to have that special intangible quality that can make a wrestler great, even when we did this feature on him. The Scotty the Body persona couldn't work forever, and I thought he had a real shot to go far on the in-ring skills he had. He ended up making it big because of a multi-layered character that he created in ECW and ended up taking to WCW, WWE, and now TNA."

—Stu Saks



SABU

(July 1992 issue)



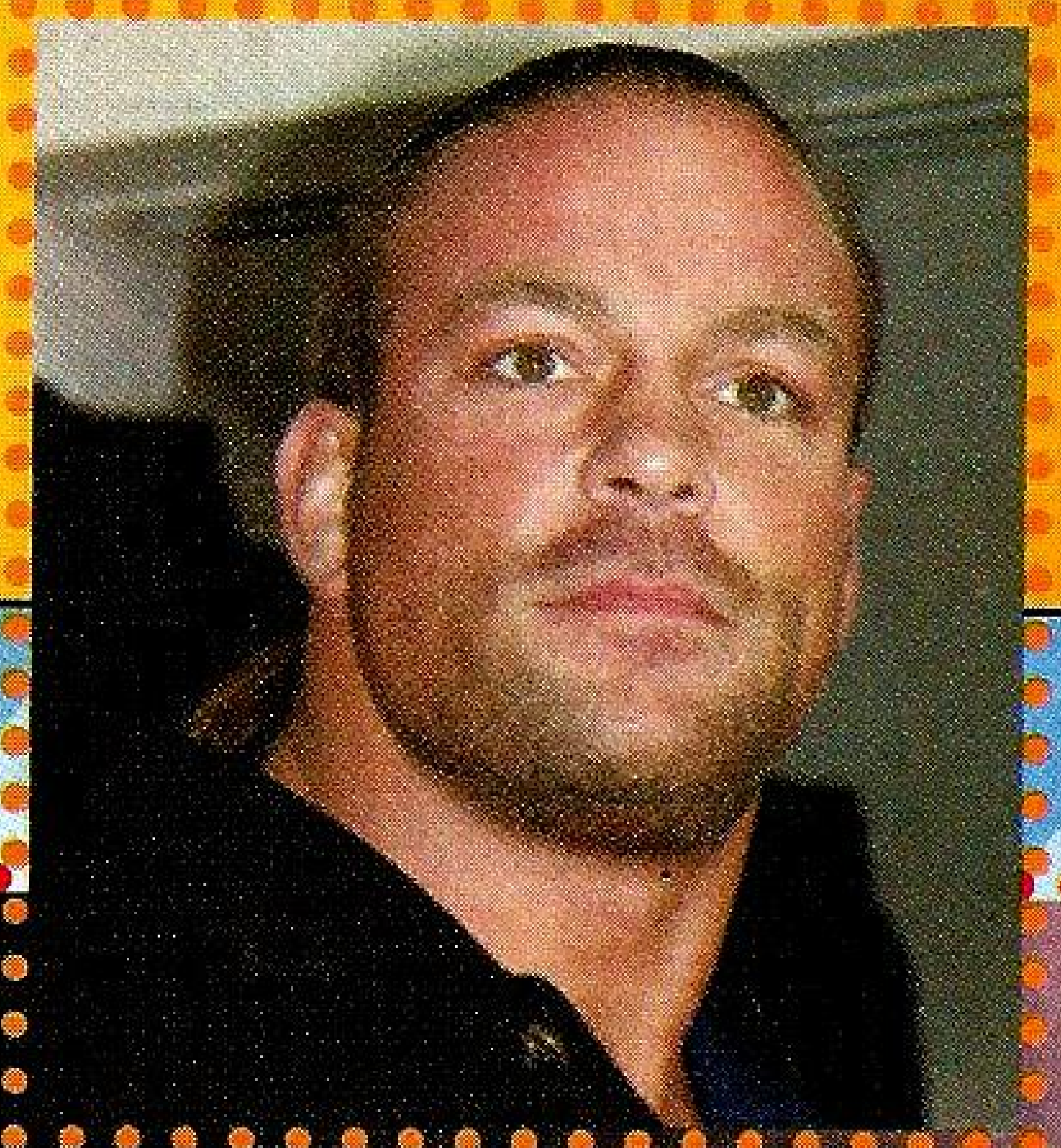
SYNOPSIS: Sabu may have exaggerated just a little when we interviewed him about his background for his "Introducing" feature (see "Memorable Quote" below), but what else would you expect from the nephew of the legendary Sheik, the man who trained him? Even Rob Van Dam, when interviewed for the story, called him "weird" and likened wrestling him to wrestling a lion or bear. At the time, Sabu had logged most of his ring time in the USWA, Japan, and on the Michigan independent scene. Those who saw him back then were amazed by his bloodthirsty, high-risk, high-impact style, highlighted by impressive flying bodypresses and cannonballs from the top rope. Remember, this was before hardcore wrestling was in vogue in the United States, before he began thrilling fans of the soon-to-be-formed ECW by moonsaulting onto tables until he broke them ... after his matches. He insisted it was his duty to carry on Sheik's "tradition of glory." Mission accomplished, many times over.

MEMORABLE QUOTE: "Sheik discovered me on the streets of Bombay ... I was an orphan in the streets, and I considered myself lucky. Before that, I lived in the jungle. I have no idea how I got there, but it's how I grew up. I learned to climb trees in the jungles, which accounts for my agility. But my violence? My hot temper? You can thank The Sheik for that."

BIG BREAK: There's no question that ECW made Sabu, but Sabu also did a whole lot to make ECW, especially in its formative years. He was scary, intimidating, and breathtaking to watch all at the same time. He was reckless in a way few fans had ever seen. If there were an ECW Hall of Fame, he'd be a charter member.

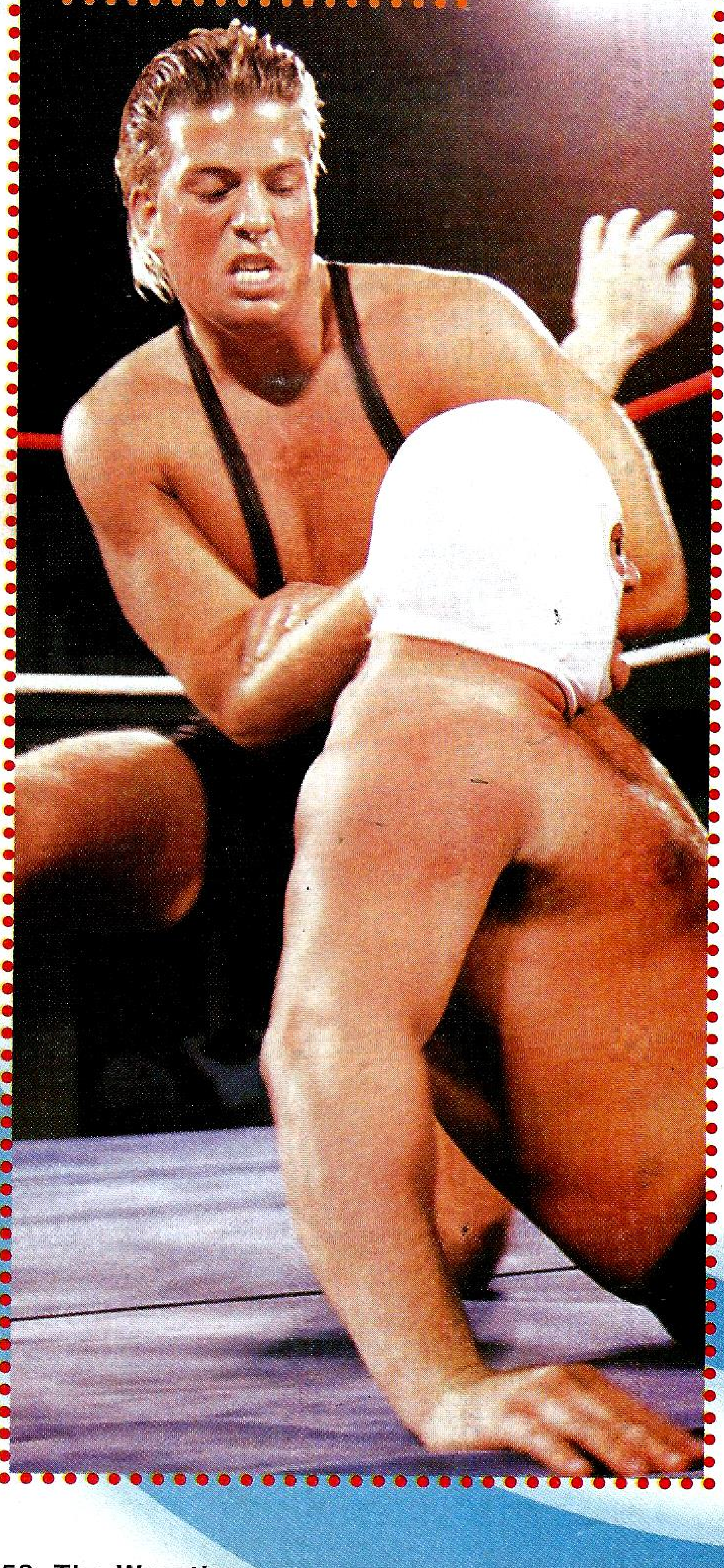
IN HINDSIGHT: "When Sabu first caught my attention, I saw him as a guy who might never have a place in a major promotion in this country. The WWF and WCW sure weren't going to touch him, not back in the early-1990s. They probably didn't understand his style at all. I wouldn't have been surprised to see him wrestle most of his career in Japan. I definitely didn't see him as a pioneer at the time, but that's what he was."

—Dave Rosenbaum



ROB VAN DAM

(August 1992 issue)



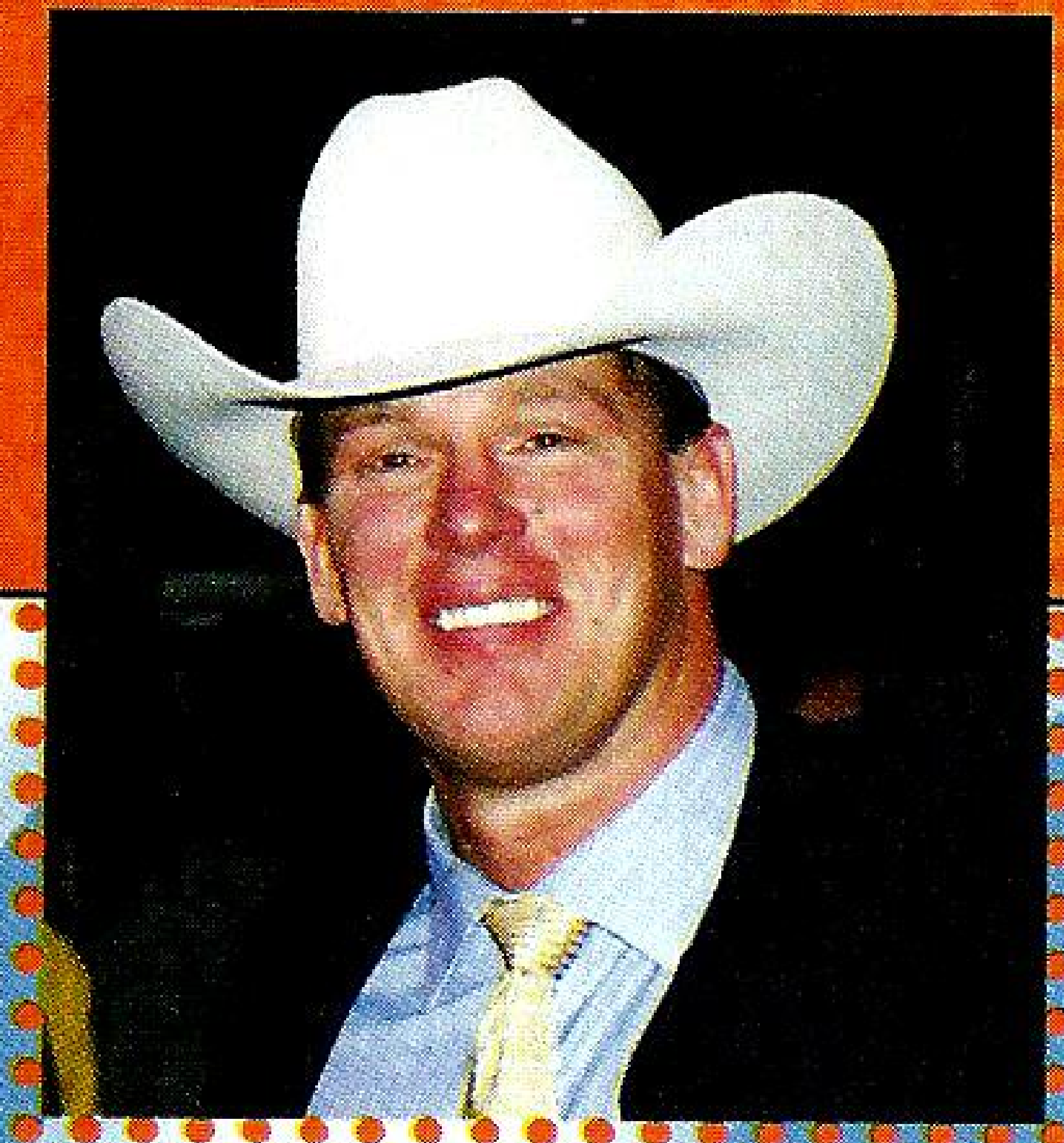
SYNOPSIS: Once an innovator, always an innovator, right, RVD? Rob Van Dam has never disputed the notion that he's innovative in the ring, not even 16 years ago, when those three initials didn't mean a damn thing. "People say I'm an innovator, but I'm only doing what comes naturally," he said in that typical arrogant-yet-laid-back RVD speak. He was discussing his unorthodox style, a style that borrowed heavily from his six years of experience as an amateur kickboxer. Current OVW owner Danny Davis, then the USWA light heavyweight champion, raved in our feature about the fight the Battle Creek, Michigan, native gave him in just Van Dam's 10th pro match. Van Dam had briefly competed under his given surname—Zatkowski—and shined in the USWA, Florida, the South Atlantic, and Michigan. Spinning kicks, assorted other kicks, suplexes ... Van Dam had a lot of tools in his arsenal. The only question seemed to be this: Could he use them all to build a complete wrestler?

MEMORABLE QUOTE: "Someday—and it's going to be soon—my balance, skill, and determination are going to put me at the top of the heap. The day of the bulked-up muscleman is over. Today, it's speed and skill that make it, and people tell me I've got both."

BIG BREAK: It took another half-decade and a lot of what seemed like aimless wandering before Van Dam arrived in ECW amid absolutely no fanfare. He initially felt like it was a poor fit and that he'd soon be moving on. Fortunately, he wasn't averse to changing his mind and staying a while.

IN HINDSIGHT: "My first impression of Van Dam was that he was a fantastic athlete, but not necessarily a fantastic wrestler. The potential to be special was there from the start, but it took him a while to find himself and see how to put all those skills to good use. Like so many misfits of that time, he found what he was looking for in ECW and just exploded from there."

—Stu Saks



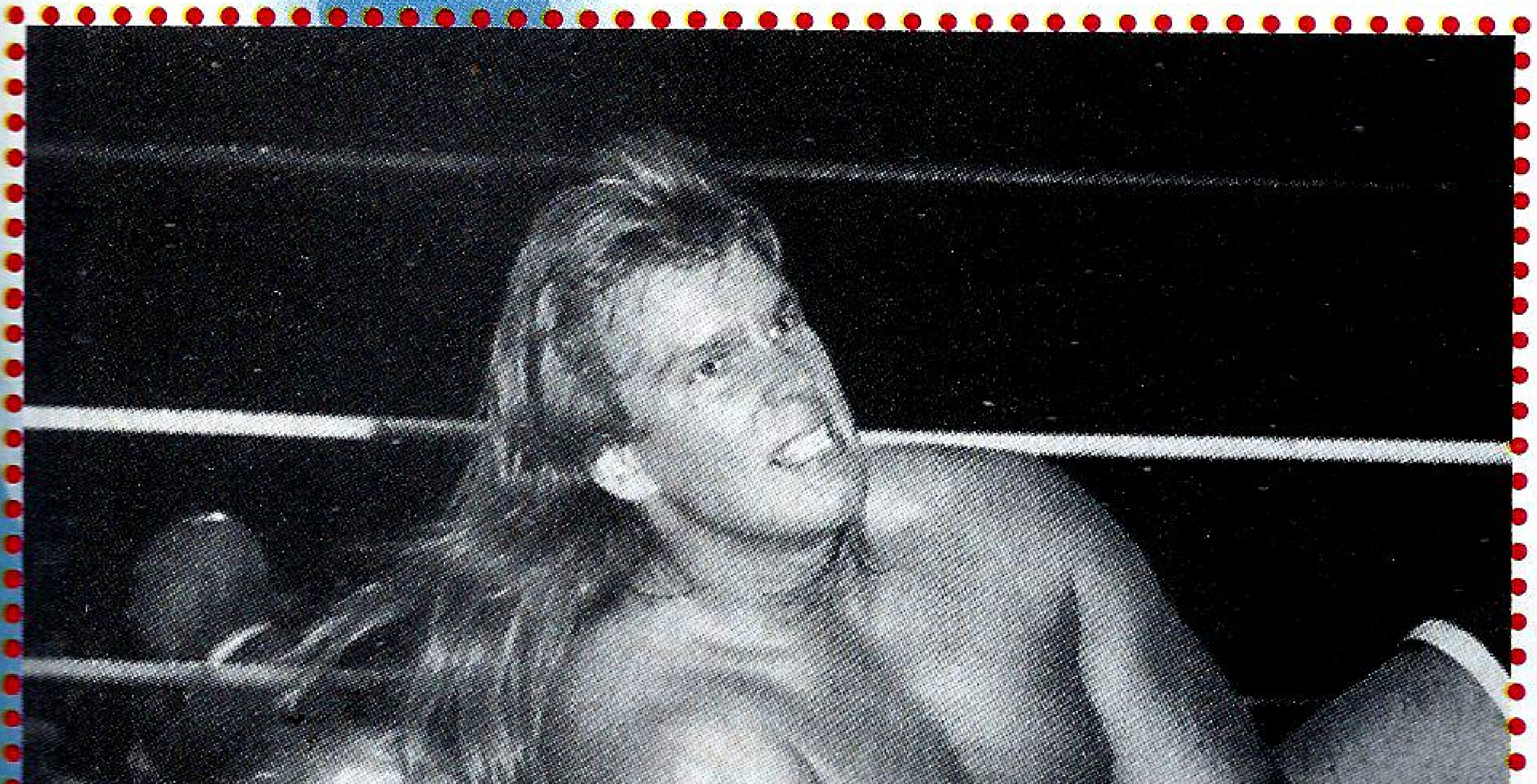
JOHN BRADSHAW LAYFIELD

[JOHN HAWK]

(April 1993 issue)

SYNOPSIS: Was it not only a year or three ago that a certain bully of a brawler from Texas asked that we consider him to be from New York instead? When the future JBL was introduced, he was a Texan through and through. Heck, he wouldn't even stand for anyone knocking the venerable Sportatorium in Dallas. It was his favorite wrestling venue when he was a youngster, and he was lucky enough to compete there himself when he joined the Global Wrestling Federation. The humble fan favorite even collected some GWF gold just a few matches into his career, capturing the tag title with Bobby Duncum Jr. The feature detailed Hawk's experience as an All-American offensive tackle at Abilene Christian University and with the NFL's bad boys, the Raiders. Revered trainer Brad Rheingans got the future JBL ready for pro wrestling, but he didn't need much help learning the hellish clothesline he used as his finisher from the start. And how's this for very un-JBL-like behavior. He got to face GWF North American champ Rod Price in just his second match and admitted to us that he didn't think he was worthy!

MEMORABLE QUOTE: "My grandpa and I used to watch wrestling from the Sportatorium every Saturday night. I used to tell him, 'Grandpa, when I get older, I'm gonna be just like Bruiser Brody. Well, no one could ever be Brody, but now I'm a pro wrestler—and I'm as proud as I can be."



BIG BREAK: Thank the "Dead Man." Hawk, originally known as Justin "Hawk" Bradshaw in WWE, managed to stumble around the promotion virtually unnoticed for several years. Eventually, The Undertaker recruited him and Faarooq for his macabre Ministry. That tag team got him noticed and put him on a long, very windy road to a highly unlikely Smackdown World title reign.

IN HINDSIGHT: "He was just another big brawler who had a chance to have a solid career or just as good a chance to disappear completely within a year or two when I first saw him. I definitely didn't see a world title in his future way back then. To be honest, I didn't see a world title in his future two months before he won it."

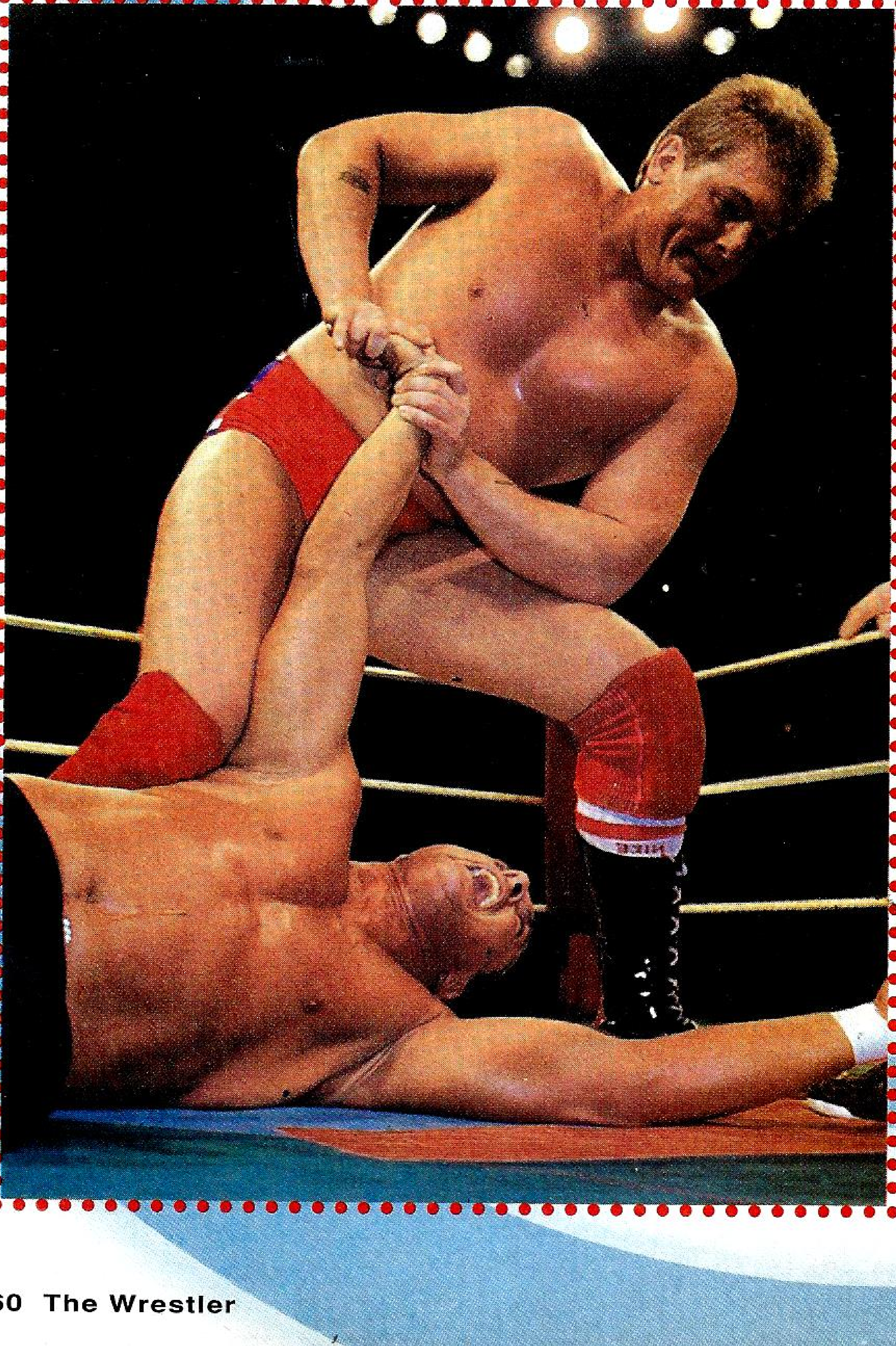
—Liz Hunter

WILLIAM REGAL

[STEVE REGAL]

(August 1993 issue)

SYNOPSIS: It's not often that we introduce someone who's been wrestling professionally for 10 years, but because Steve Regal had just debuted in North America, we made an exception. It was odd that it had taken the Blackpool, England, native so long to get here, as he had wrestled in nearly 20 other countries to that point. What a tale he had to tell. How many other wrestlers can say their first match took place at a carnival, and that it ended with them being carried out on a stretcher and taken to a hospital? But Regal survived that pummeling from Col. Brody and came back a week later and took another beating from him, just not as severe. Soon he was globetrotting, with one journey taking him to Delhi, India. He first piqued the interest of WCW promoters when he competed on a WCW tour of the United Kingdom in 1991.



MEMORABLE QUOTE: "I've never stayed in one place. I just traveled. My main ambition right now is to get to as many countries as possible, and I've done 19. Everywhere I've gone, I've stayed as long as I could learn something. When the time came that I couldn't learn anymore, I left."

BIG BREAK: It happened not long after we introduced him, as WCW changed "Steve" to "Steven," added "Lord" to his name, and gave him veteran Bill Dundee (Sir William) as his manager/butler/manservant. For a man who made his own break at the outset of his career by wrestling at carnivals and other unusual places, the royalty element didn't seem to make sense. But he's been making the uppity Englishman persona work brilliantly ever since.

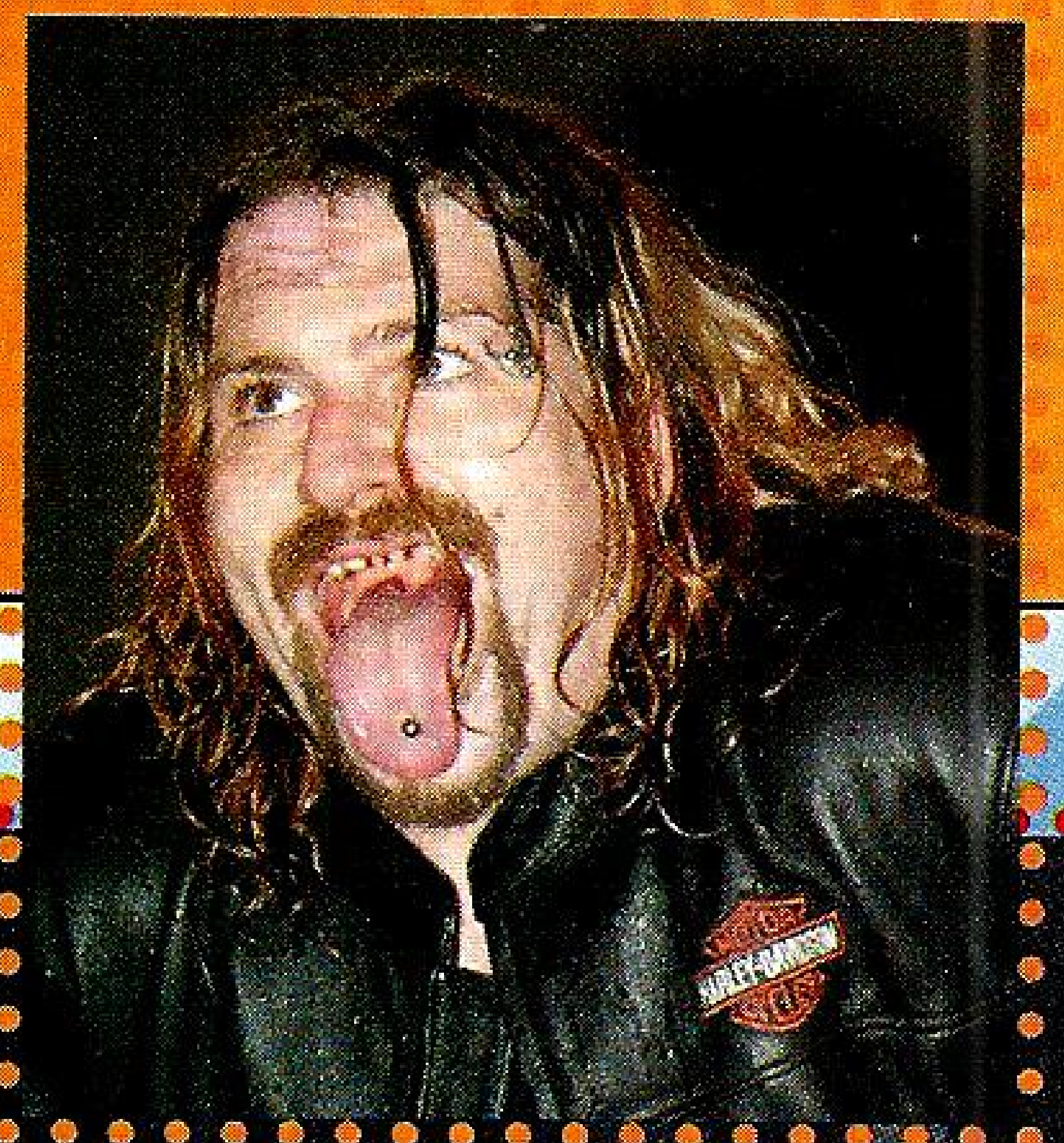
IN HINDSIGHT: "Regal had a very interesting background, but it would have been hard to play off that in developing a persona. I know I liked what he could do in the ring when I first saw him, but I was afraid his style wasn't nearly flashy enough for American audiences. He needed a little something extra, and he sure found it with the Lord Steven Regal thing. You could really believe he comes from royalty."

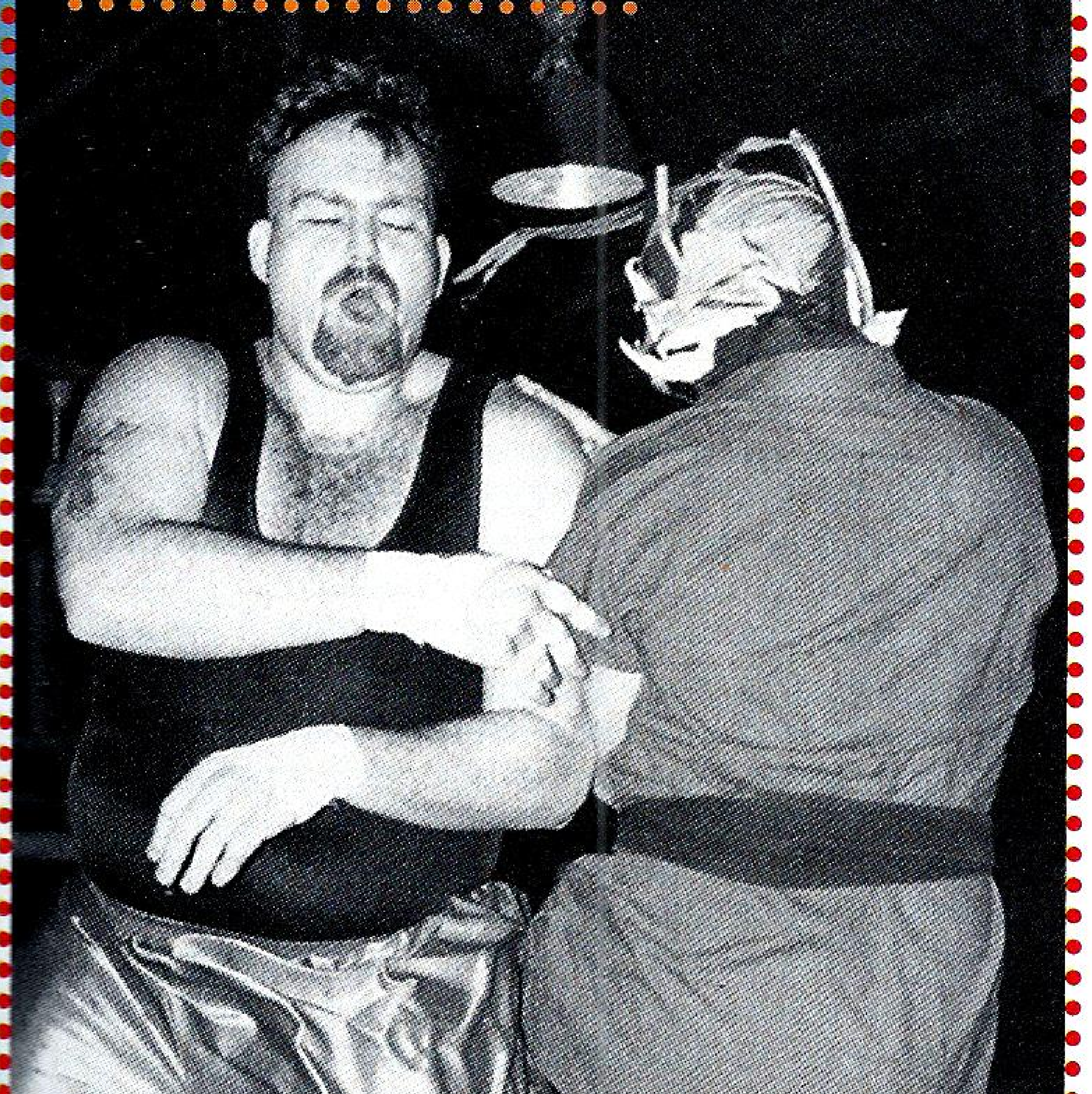
—Liz Hunter

MAHONEY

ABBUDAH SINGH

(June 1994 issue)





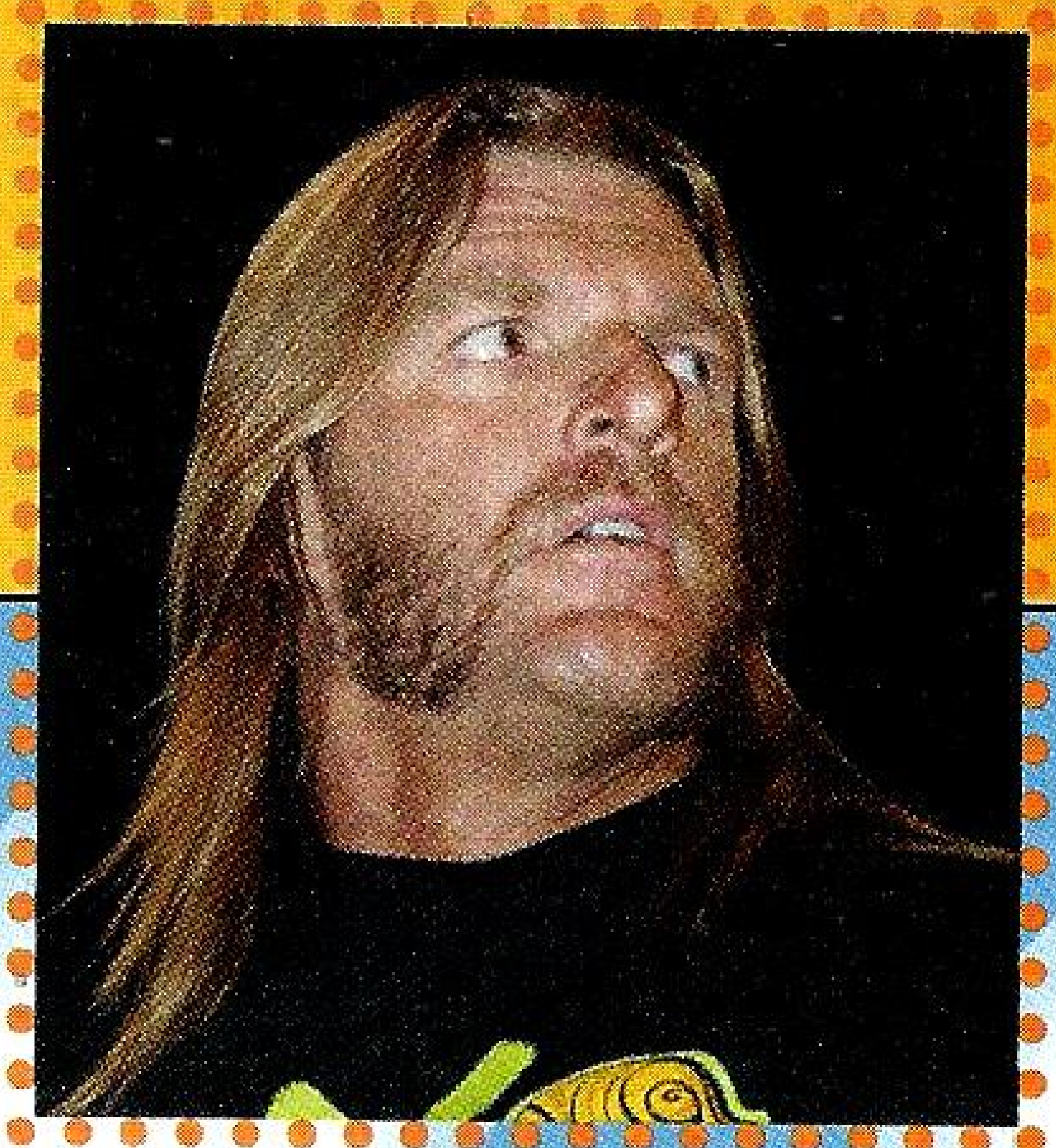
SYNOPSIS: How's this for a backstory for the guy we now know as "Chair-Swinging Freak" Mahoney of ECW fame? Then known as Abbudah Singh, he was discovered in Singapore by promoter Larry Sharpe, who saw him fight off five men (two brandishing weapons) in a street brawl and brought him to the States. Within a few months, Sharpe unleashed him on opponents in his World Wrestling Alliance. The 310-pounder was very raw—often attempting high-risk moonsaults and wrestling so recklessly that he got himself disqualified—but he was very dangerous. He refined his technique gradually by wrestling not only fellow inexperienced grapplers such as The Spider, but also respected veterans such as Big Bossman. A few promoters were hesitant to book him for fear of what he might do. Heck, even Sharpe was second-guessing his decision to bring Singh to the States.

MEMORABLE QUOTE: "I will wrestle in any type of match—steel cage, Texas death, it doesn't matter. I will use foreign objects if I want to. I don't care. Being in the ring reminds me of home. In my country, I loved to fight. There were no rules in the streets. That is the way it should be in wrestling."

BIG BREAK: It came shortly after the magazine featuring his "Introducing" hit the newsstands. Nothing really special was expected to happen in a 1994 WWA match in New Jersey between Singh and Abdullah the Butcher. But something frightening did. Singh scorched the Butcher with a fireball so viciously that several layers of skin ripped off Abby's chest, and he was rushed to the hospital afterward. It received full-color coverage in *PWI*, and a lot of important people took notice.

IN HINDSIGHT: "Mahoney's career has taken more or less the path I figured it might when I first saw him as Abbudah Singh. He's been basically a journeyman, but he made a mark in ECW, and he's gotten his shot in WWE. Not many can say that. I think he'd have been a better fit in the territorial days, when he could have moved from area to area serving as a hired gun type."

—Dave Lenker



TRIPLE-H

TERRA RYZING

(July 1994 issue)

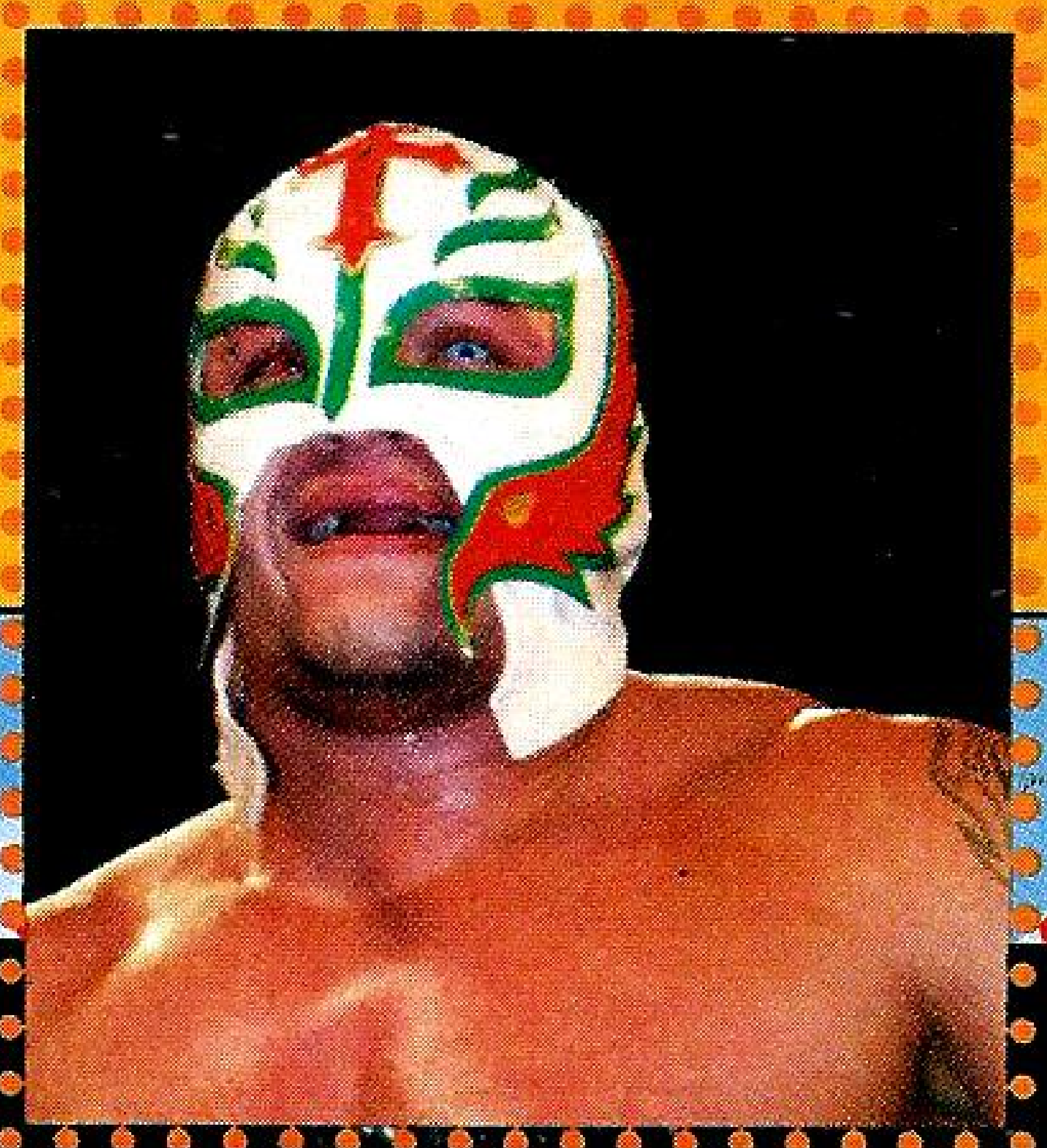
SYNOPSIS: It should come as no surprise to anyone now that Terra Ryzing—the future Triple-H—entered pro wrestling by way of the world of bodybuilding, at which he excelled as a young man. Killer Kowalski liked what he saw in the guy and trained him well, giving him his start in his Massachusetts-based IWF. It didn't take long for him to win the promotion's heavyweight championship—in his first title shot no less. Funny thing is, he thought a new hold he learned from Kowalski, a version of the Indian deathlock he saw Wahoo McDaniel use, would take him far in the sport. Have we seen him use that hold in WWE lately … or ever? He used it to beat Keith Cole in his WCW debut, and Terra Ryzing's career was a-rising. As for comparisons to a young Ric Flair, well, he didn't discourage them.

MEMORABLE QUOTE: "Ric Flair was my idol. I used to love watching him on TV when I was growing up. It's an honor being in the same federation as him. I'd love to team with the man, but, then again, maybe it would be better for me to face him in the ring. Everyone would remember my name if I could beat the 'Nature Boy' himself."

BIG BREAK: He became tight with Shawn Michaels, Kevin Nash, and Scott Hall behind the scenes in the WWF long before establishing on-air alliances with any of them. That alliance burned him a few times early on, but where do you think he learned to be such a rebel, such a degenerate, if you will?

IN HINDSIGHT: "I liked the ring name Terra Ryzing when I first heard it, but I thought he had the chance to fade out of WCW before anyone noticed he was there. I'd also say I didn't detect much attitude from him the first few times I talked to him. He took a very serious approach to everything, and if he was going to make it, I figured he'd do so by playing things pretty straight. I guess he wanted to establish the substance before showing us all his style."

—Dave Lenker



REY MYSTERIO JR.

(February 1996 issue)

SYNOPSIS: Just about everyone who's followed Rey Mysterio Jr.'s career knows much of the legend by now (although this legend is entirely factual). He grew up in San Diego (to all of 5'3" and barely 150 pounds) and was a huge fan of his uncle, lucha star Rey Mysterio Sr. As a youngster, he begged his uncle to teach him moves, which he learned very quickly. He got his start at age 14, just when AAA was being formed in Mexico. Originally took the name Colibri (hummingbird) for fairly obvious reasons. He was stunned when, after one exhausting match, his uncle announced in the ring that he wanted him to use the name Rey Mysterio Jr. They ended up forming a thrilling and ultra-successful tag team in Mexico, and Rey Jr. went on to feud with fellow future stars Psicosis and Juventud Guerrera. His future looked very bright when we introduced him, right after he joined ECW. A little more than a decade later, he'd win a world title on the biggest stage of them all, WrestleMania.

MEMORABLE QUOTE: "I will never disgrace my uncle or my family name. People associate excellence with the Mysterio name, and that is what they get from me in every match."

BIG BREAK: Credit Paul Heyman for giving him his first chance to shine in front of a large audience in the United States. He took full advantage. But Eric Bischoff gave him a gigantic break by signing him to a WCW contract later and immediately making him a cornerstone of the innovative cruiserweight division.

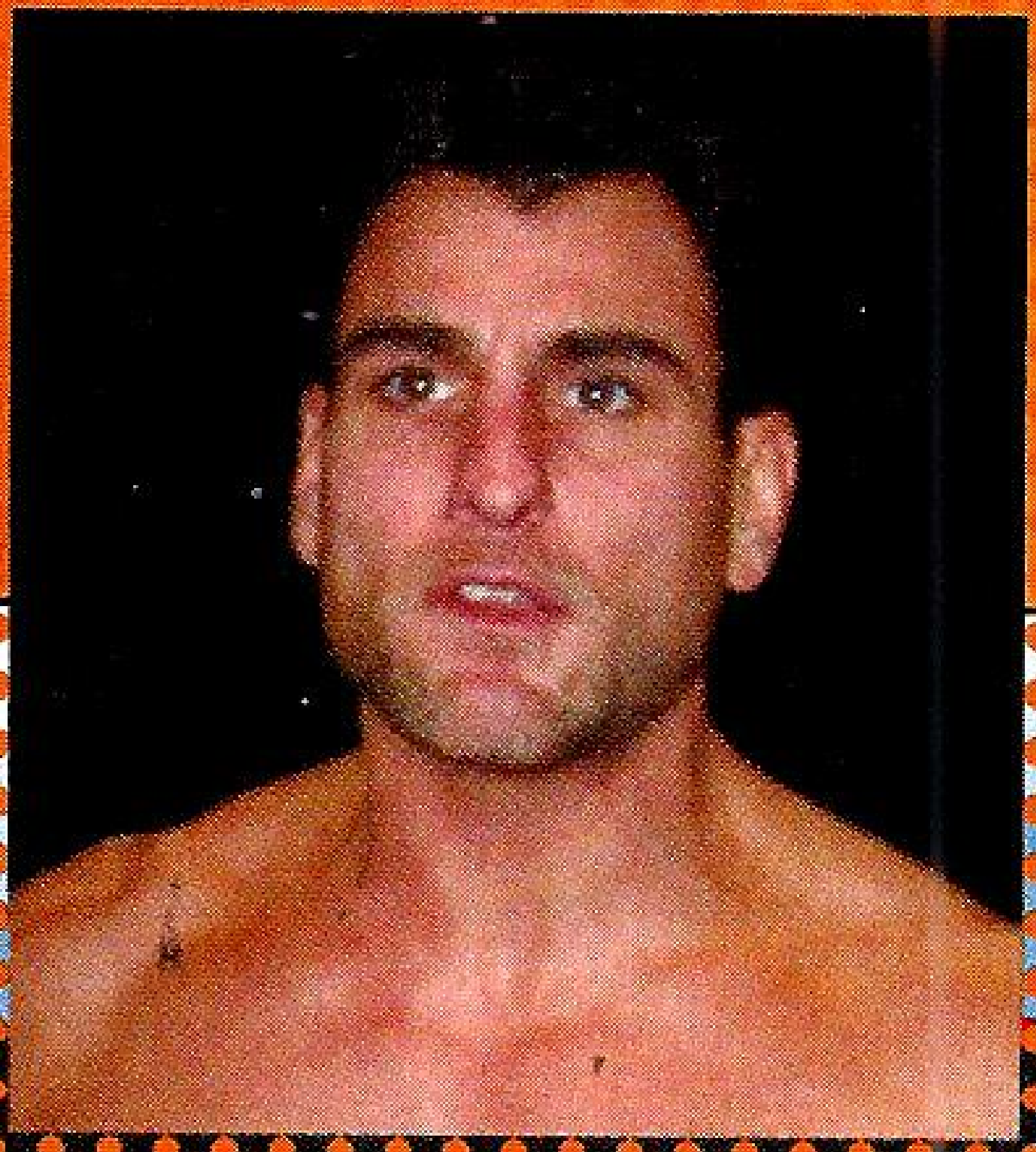
IN HINDSIGHT: "When I first saw Mysterio in ECW, I was flat-out blown away by the things he could do, and I've seen a lot. He was every bit as amazing when he started in WCW. You just knew that if given a chance, he could do a lot to revolutionize the sport, and that's just what he did. To be honest, I can't say I'm shocked that he went on to become a world champion. It should have happened years earlier."

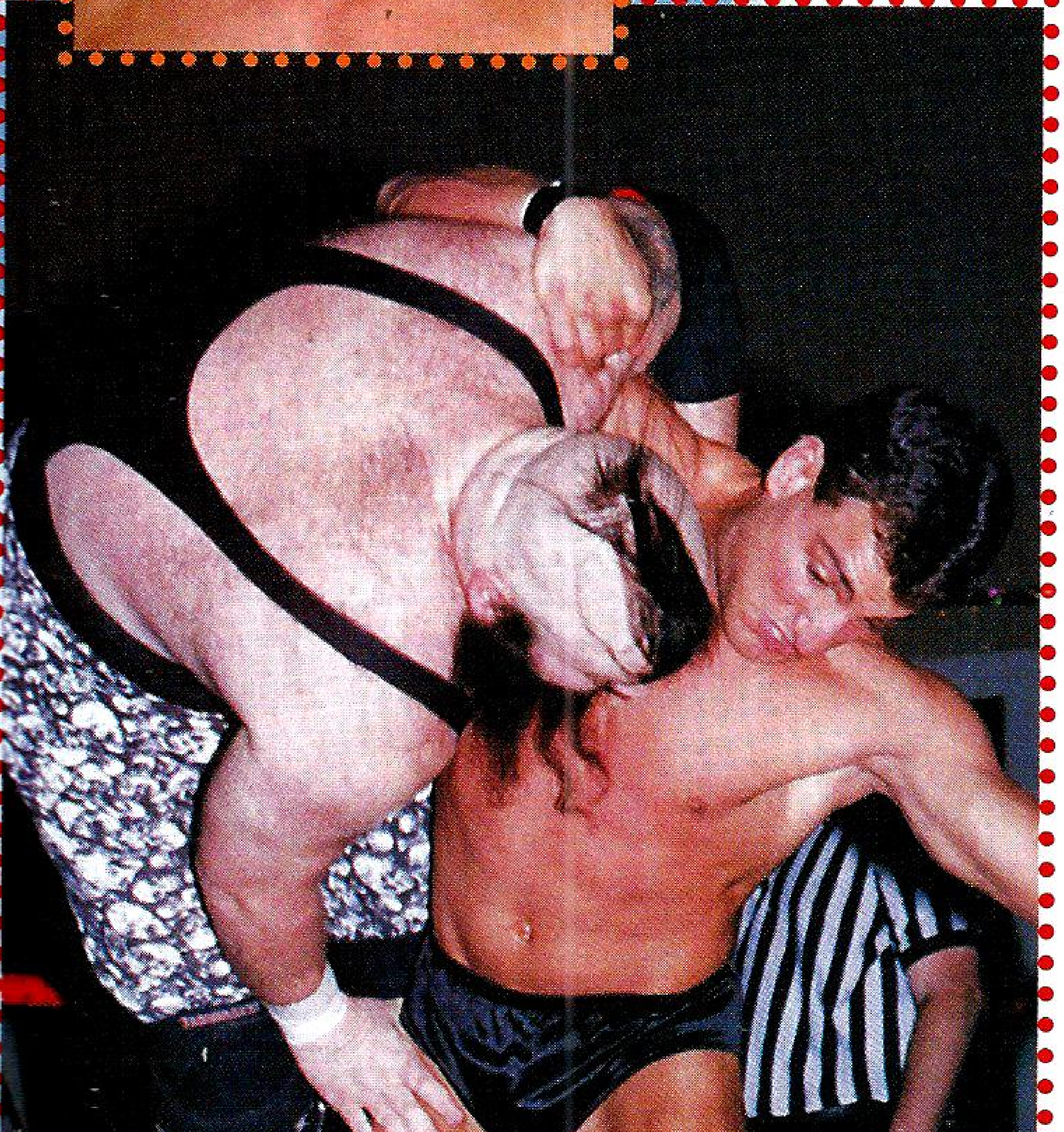
—Stu Saks

LITTLE GUIDO

JAMES STONE

(September 1996)





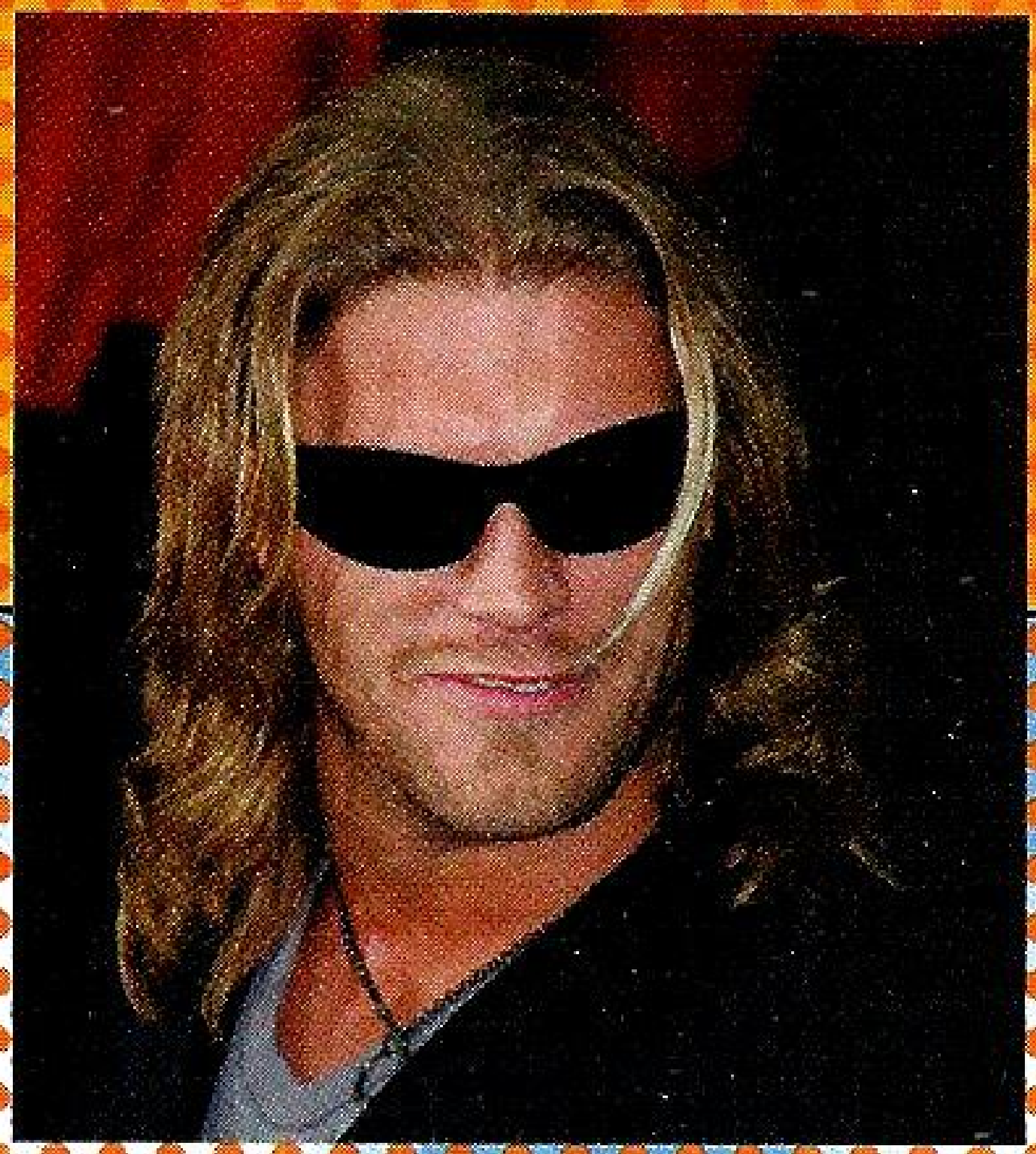
SYNOPSIS: There's little question that Little Guido is a full-blooded Italian. It was just the partners that he chose that seemed suspect. James Stone showed us a little of that famous Italian temper of his when we interviewed him for "Introducing." He dared anyone to say anything bad about his hometown of Howard Beach, New York—coincidentally the home of notorious mobster John Gotti—and face the consequences. Once we got beyond that, however, he had an interesting tale to tell. He had an outstanding amateur background and also gained valuable experience in Japan's UWFI—in which Big Van Vader famously toiled—as well as all around the Northeast and in Tennessee. But he was concerned about his lack of size (5'9", 201 pounds) and a broken jaw he suffered in a match before he joined ECW and formed The Full-Blooded Italians with African-American partner J.T. Smith. Would he be taken seriously by ECW fans? It would prove hard after he added good ol' Southern boys Tommy Rich and Tracy Smothers to his Italian faction.

MEMORABLE QUOTE: "I figure this: I need to add about 25 pounds if people are going to take me seriously in ECW, and I'm talking about promoters and matchmakers. When I'm not wrestling, I'm helping to run my family's pizza parlor in the Bronx, so maybe if I hang out there enough, I'll eat the product, if you know what I mean."

BIG BREAK: Just getting to ECW was huge for him, and he won over fans with his comedic exploits. Hard to believe that, 10 years later, he's still not just on the scene, but on the WWE roster. He is still on the WWE roster, right?

IN HINDSIGHT: "I didn't give Stone much of a chance of making this FBI gimmick work in ECW in front of those rabid fans back in 1996. He was and is a fantastic technical wrestler, and I thought he'd be better off trying to win over fans that way, but for years they chanted 'Where's my pizza!' at him, so I guess he did get respect in an odd way."

—Dave Rosenbaum

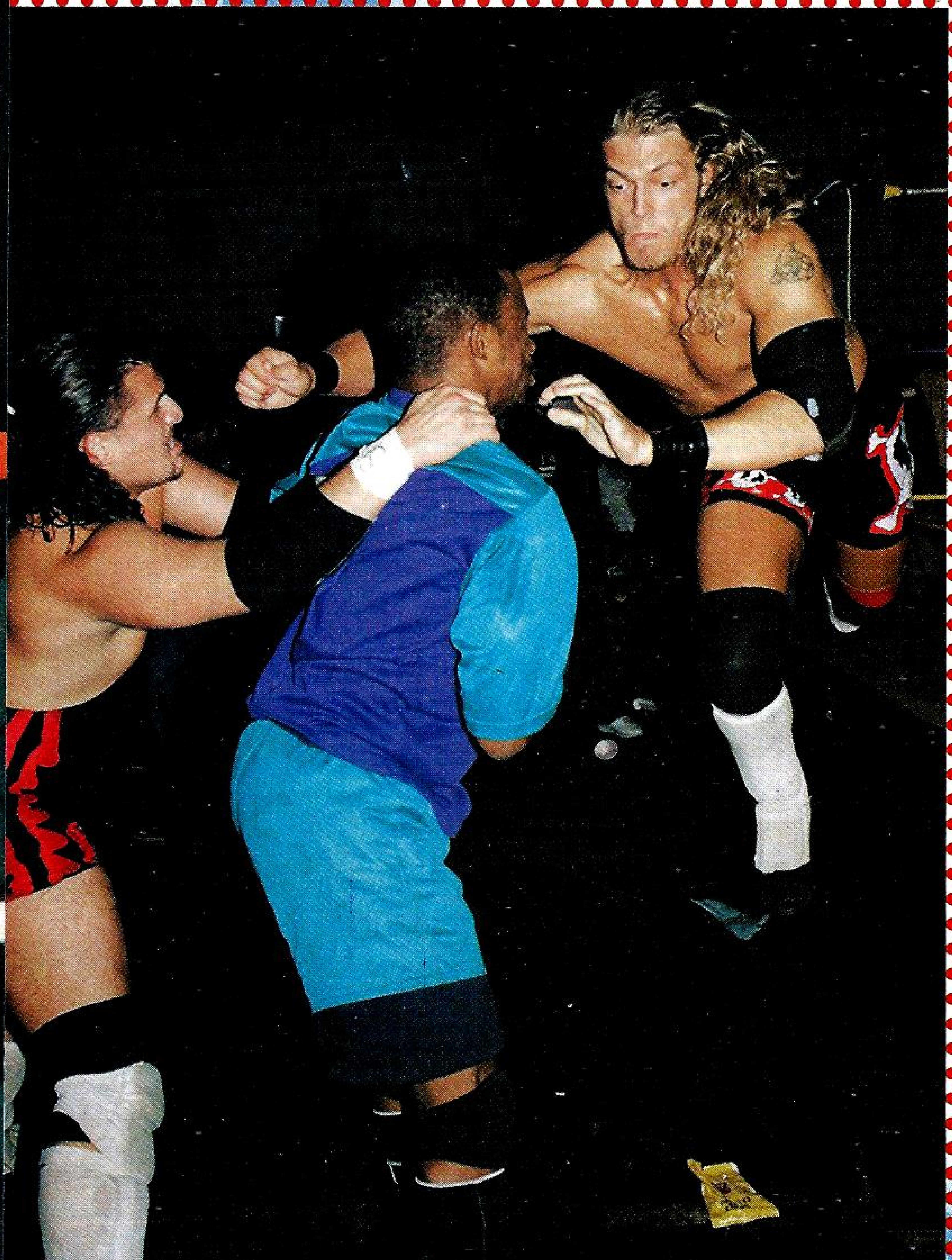


EDGE & JOE E. LEGEND

SEX & VIOLENCE

(February 1997 issue)

SYNOPSIS: The name seems strangely appropriate given that one-half of the duo, Sexton Hardcastle, went on to become Edge, and some nine years later, he and Lita staged a 'live sex show' in the middle of the ring as part of a main-event segment on Raw. Eleven years ago, Hardcastle and Joe E. Legend (who would briefly wrestle and agitate in WWE as Just Joe) called their team "a beautiful marriage between ecstasy and agony." With manager Johnny Bradford, they were at times dominant on the Michigan/Canadian indy scenes, collecting tag titles as they moved from promotion to promotion. Legend had more international experience than Hardcastle at the time, having wrestled in Japan and South Africa. The two men had even feuded rather violently before deciding they were better off working together. Somewhat surprisingly, although careers in WCW and the WWF did interest them, their main goal was to make it big in All Japan.

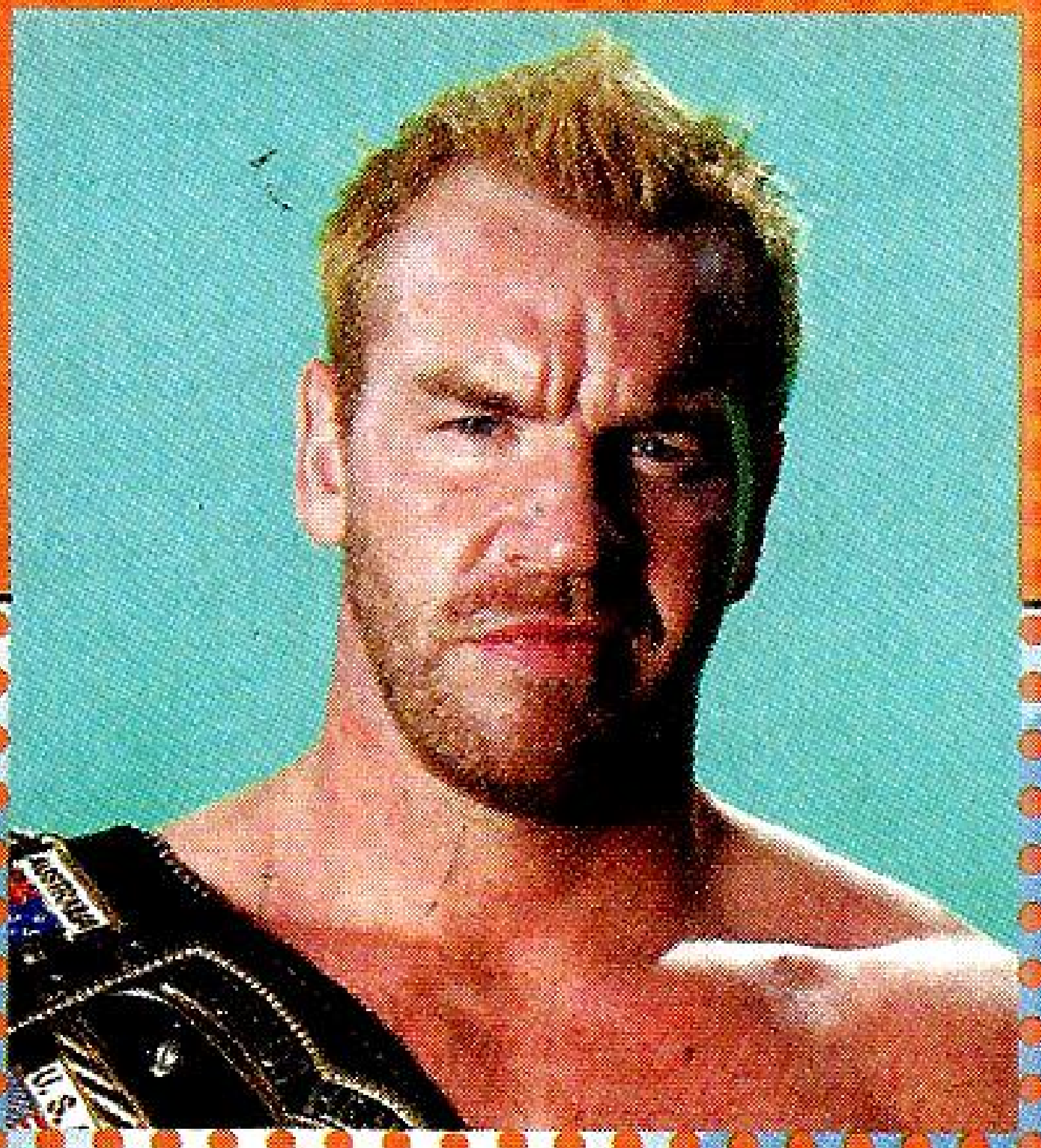


MEMORABLE QUOTE: "There's never been a tag team with the guts to use the name 'Sex & Violence.' Admit it—it's not a name that's easy to forget. And once you see us in action, you won't forget us. We're that good." —Sexton Hardcastle

BIG BREAK: How many wrestlers can say that they got their start after writing an essay titled "Why I Want To Be A Pro Wrestler"? Edge can. He entered a local newspaper contest, and his essay was judged to be the best. He thus earned the right to be trained for free by former wrestler Sweet Daddy Siki. Had this not happened, Sex & Violence might never have happened. And if that never happened ...

IN HINDSIGHT: "I was almost surprised, given that the 'Attitude' era was just getting into full swing and Vince Russo loved to test boundaries, that the WWF didn't bring these two in as Sex & Violence. But even though Legend was bigger and more experienced at the time, you could tell that Edge had the kind of look that the Fed really looked for at the time. I did think he'd be a star someday."

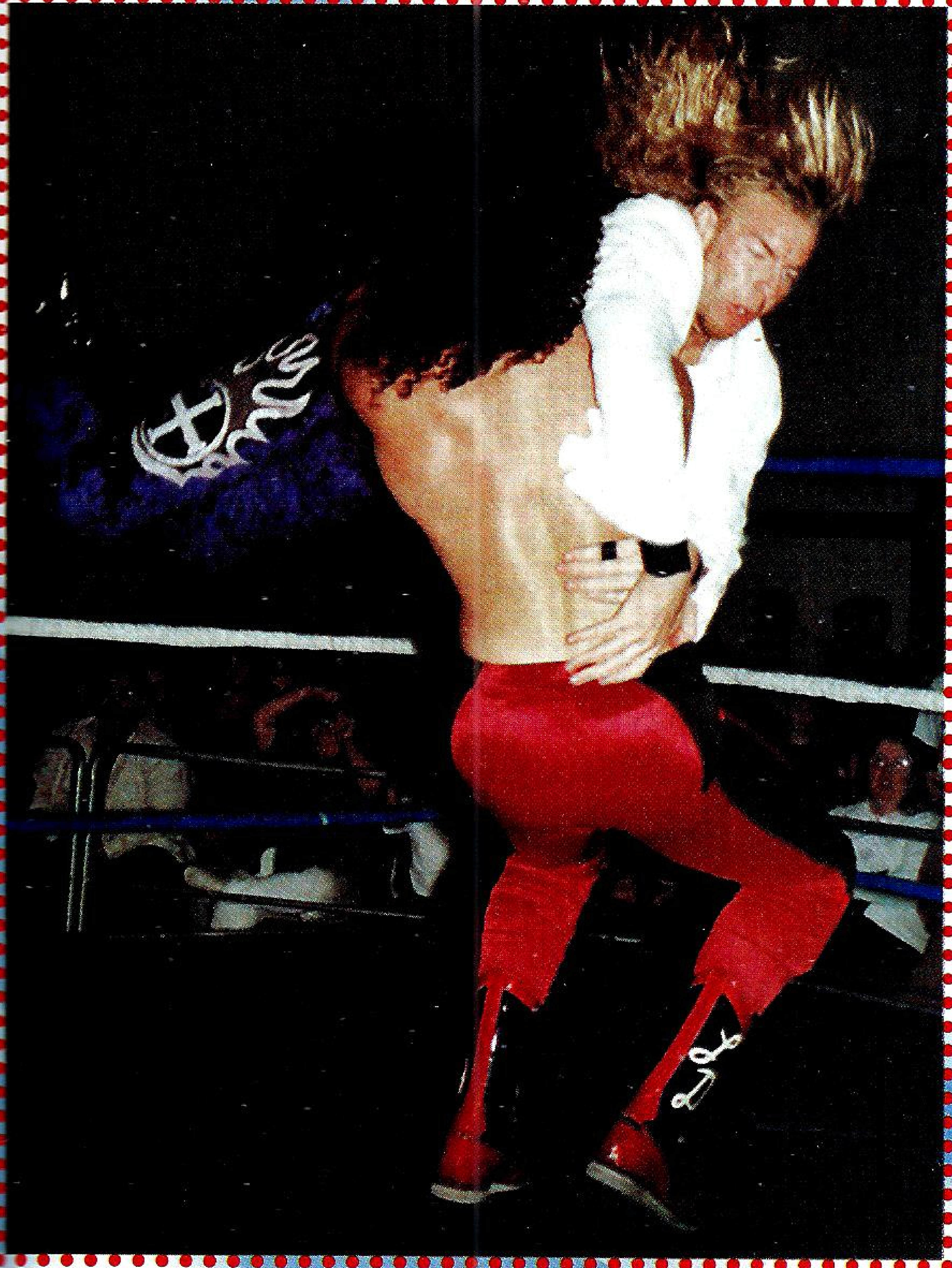
—Stu Saks



CHRISTIAN CAGE

(September 1997 issue)

SYNOPSIS: What was it with these Canadian guys and their hatred for the United States a decade ago? Thanks, Bret Hart. Cage relayed the strange story of how he, Sexton Hardcastle (Edge), Rhino Richards (Rhino), and Joe E. Legend (Just Joe) joined forces as Thug Life. He and Hardcastle, it seemed, abruptly ended their bitter feud when they felt an American promoter was reveling in the fact that he had two Canadians bitterly fighting. It didn't help that this promoter (Cage called him a "scoundrel") had previously insisted that they bill themselves from New Jersey rather than Toronto. Cage also discussed how he chose wrestling over hockey—the favorite sport of most of his friends—at an early age, his educational background (he earned a degree in social science at Humber College in Toronto), and his wrestling repertoire, which included a slingshot moonsault, a Texas cloverleaf, and an octopus abdominal stretch. He delighted most (surprise!) in talking about how Canada was superior to the U.S.

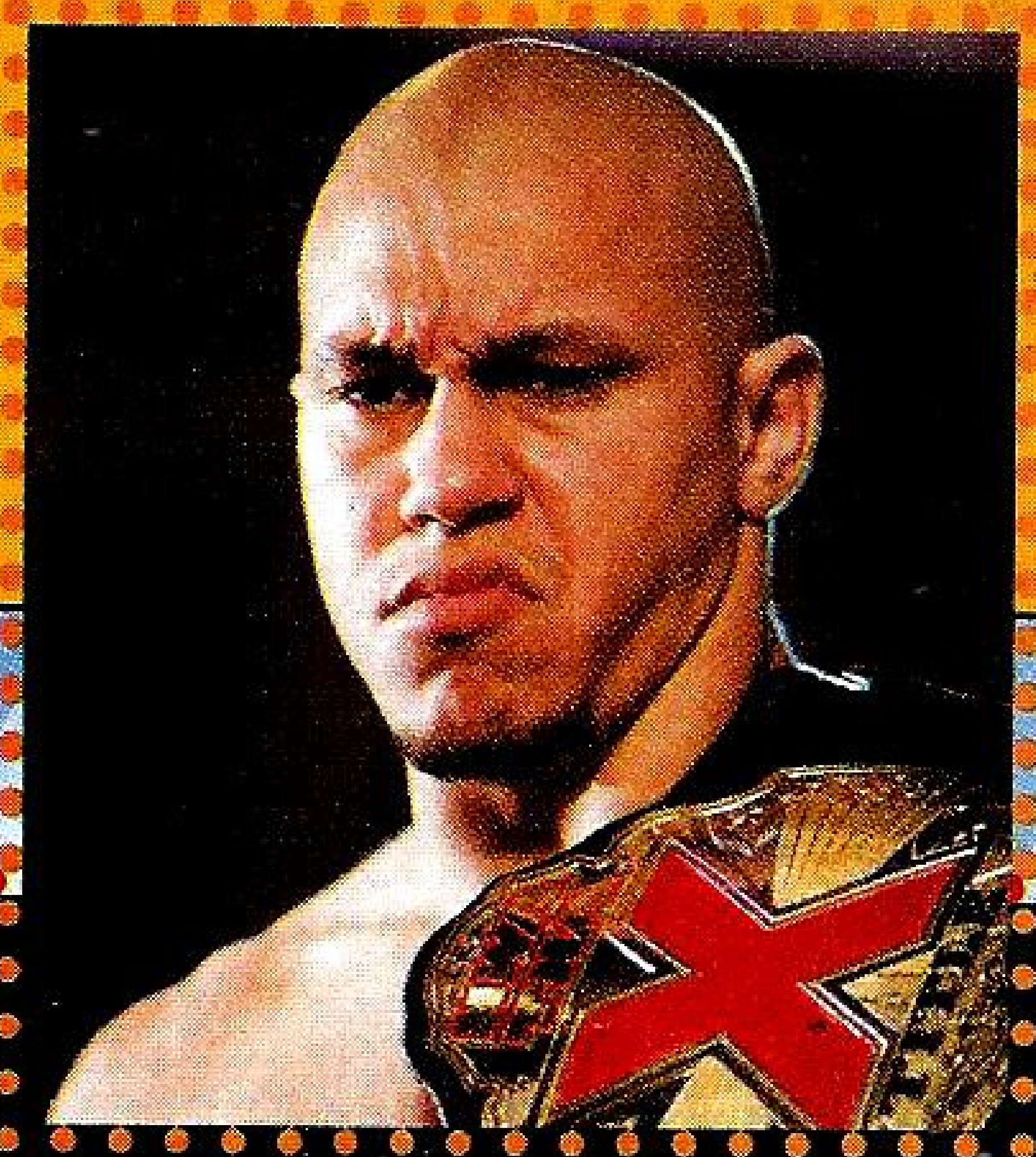


MEMORABLE QUOTE: "I used to go to Maple Leaf Gardens for the WWF matches. Other kids used to say to me, 'You're going to the Gardens? There's no game tonight!' Then I'd look at them and say, 'It's wrestling, stupid.' I never thought it was fair that when people talked about the greatest Canadian athletes, they'd never talk about Chris Benoit or Bret Hart or the Rougeaus. It was always Gretzky, Lemieux, Howe. These people were ignorant. They didn't know any better."

BIG BREAK: It happened before we introduced him. That hook-up with Edge, Rhino, and Joe paid huge dividends. Funny that he didn't mention anything to us about Edge being his brother.

IN HINDSIGHT: "When I first spoke to him and saw him in action, I definitely got the impression that Christian was just capitalizing on the Canada-U.S. feud that Bret Hart and company started in the WWF. I'm always wary of independent guys playing off things that are going on in the WWF. You could see he had a lot of skill back then, but I definitely didn't peg him as a future world champion."

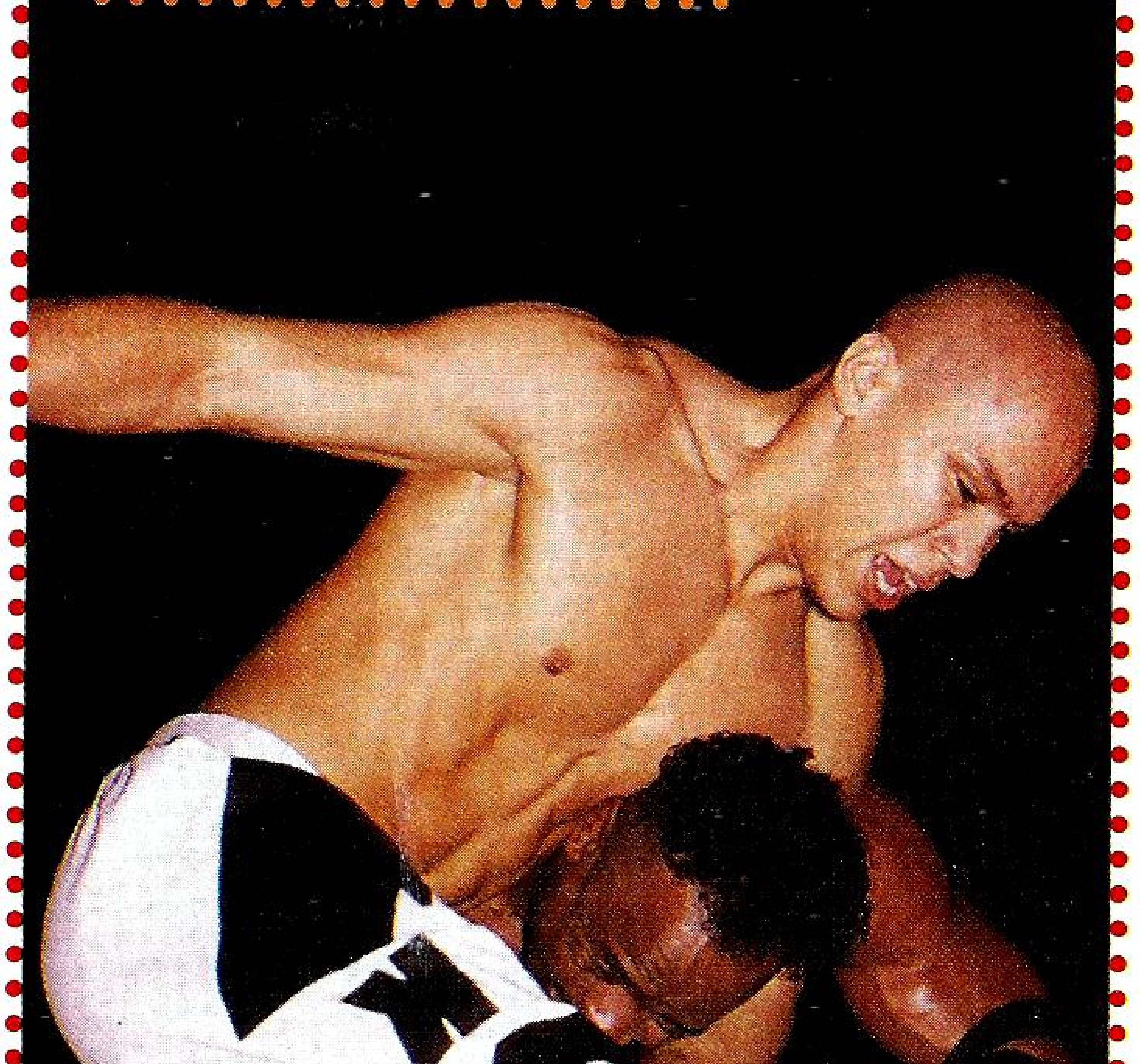
—Dave Rosenbaum



SENSHI

[LOW-KI]

(November 2000 issue)



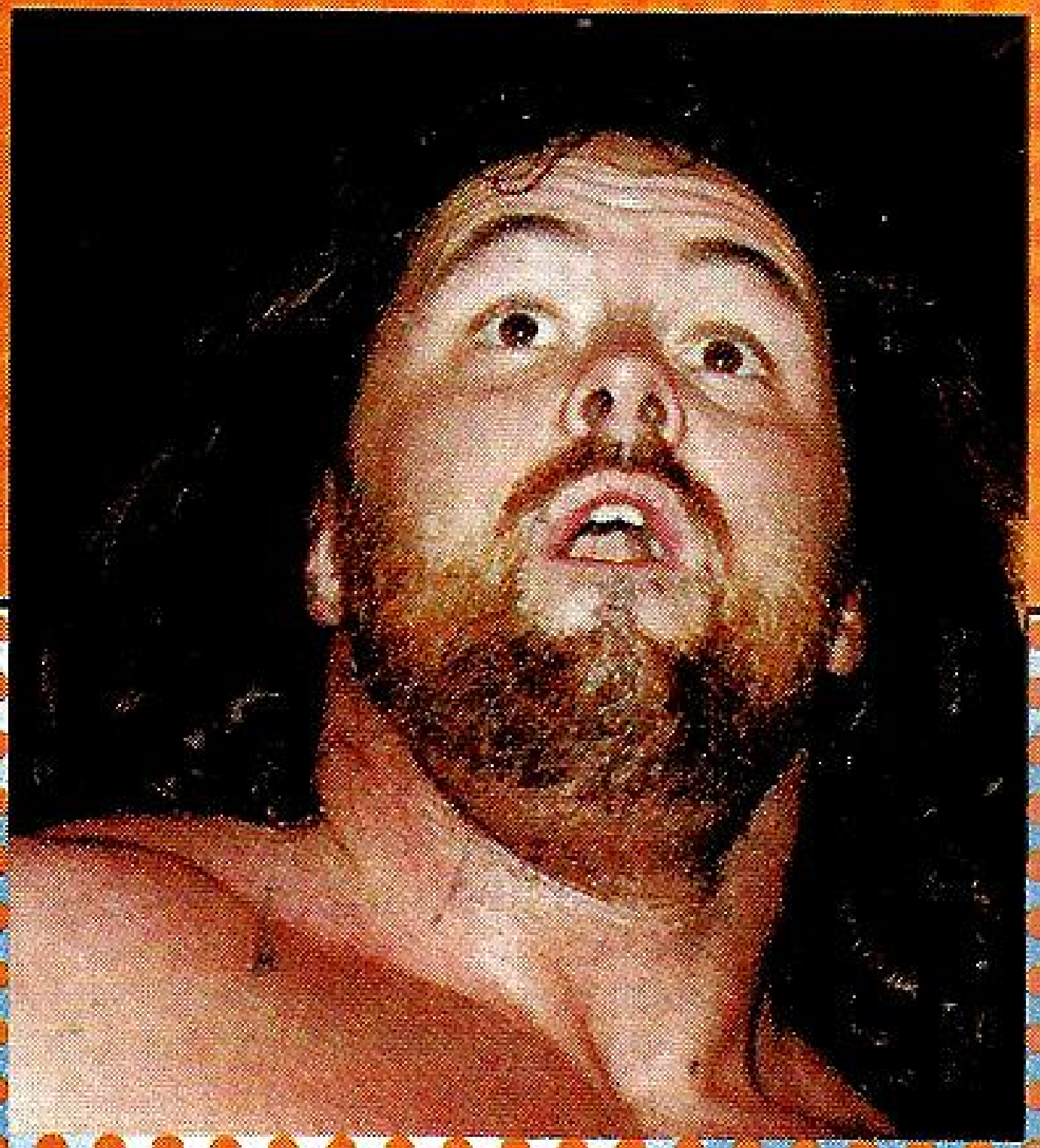
SYNOPSIS: There are two basic ways in which you might look at Low-Ki's career thus far. On one hand, it's admirable that he has rarely wavered from his ultra-serious approach to wrestling. On the other hand, he might have already gone further if he were willing to bend a little. Low-Ki made it clear from the start that he was a wrestler, not a sports entertainer. It was no surprise that he counted Chris Benoit as one of his major influences when we introduced him. The Brooklyn native also had a no-nonsense mentor in Homicide, who began training him in a rundown church. It didn't take him long to gain a cult following on the East Coast independent scene. He often feuded with wrestlers who were anything but serious, including Billy Reil. Low-Ki said he hoped to do his part to get fans to appreciate more of the competitive aspect of the sport rather than the sexier "entertainment" part. He wasn't big on promos or backstage skits. For that reason, he felt a career in Japan might be to his liking.

MEMORABLE QUOTE: "Professional wrestling is my job. I'm not out there to grab the microphone, talk trash, or grandstand for the crowd. I'm out there to win matches. If people don't like that, that's too bad. They can go and cheer the flashy wrestlers."

BIG BREAK: Like a lot of up-and-coming wrestlers half a decade ago, Low-Ki was intrigued by the idea behind this new independent company that was starting up out of Philadelphia. Yes, Ring of Honor took off in 2002 and is going stronger than ever in 2007. Low-Ki became the first ROH champion five summers ago after winning a grueling four-way, 60-minute match on a steamy night in Philly. It was a huge victory for a hungry wrestler.

IN HINDSIGHT: "It probably doesn't surprise anyone that I had a hard time getting Low-Ki to open up and show some personality when I interviewed him for 'Introducing.' He's all business all the time, it seems. Did I think he'd make it big back then? Not necessarily, but it wasn't that he didn't have the talent. It's just that to make it big, you really need to show something more."

—Will Welsh



EUGENE

NICK DINSMORE

(May 2001 issue)

SYNOPSIS: You might say it's ironic that a young man who built such a fine reputation in OVW simply by being a terrific wrestler (hence the nickname "Mr. Wrestling") needed to take on a ridiculous gimmick to make it to WWE. Nick Dinsmore ... meet your new alter-ego, Eugene. No, really. Dinsmore was already a five-time OVW champ when we featured him in "Introducing." He also had limited experience in WCW against some top stars—before he got his WWE developmental deal, of course. Once he got that deal and grabbed some OVW gold, he defeated established stars Mark Henry and Al Snow. Years prior, he excelled in both football and wrestling in high school. He told us about his appreciation for European stars such as The British Bulldogs and his partnership and subsequent feud with Rob Conway. Eugene fans might be shocked to learn that he attended Indiana University Southeast while in OVW. Also interesting in retrospect was his passing comment about having to be patient, keep improving, and wait for that call-up from WWE. Little did he know what he'd hear once the phone finally rang.

MEMORABLE QUOTE: "I've got the developmental deal and I'm trying to catch a break. I feel I'm on the upper plateau, but I'm not about to take anything for granted. I'm just going to work as hard as I can and see what happens."

BIG BREAK: "Uncle Eric" didn't give it to him. Neither did William Regal. He defeated Al Snow at OVW's "Rock 'n' Rumble" event on June 23, 2000, and earned a developmental deal soon thereafter. Snow told WWE higher-ups he thought Dinsmore was special. They must have misunderstood.

IN HINDSIGHT: "I've never figured out the rationale behind WWE's evaluation of OVW talent. Some guys get called up too early, some get called up too late, some never should make it but get chance after chance, and some with great potential never get a shot. Dinsmore did what he had to do to get to the dance and was a big star for a year or so, but because the Eugene thing is so limiting, WWE fans will probably never get to see all the tremendous things he showed he could do in OVW. That's a shame."

—Dan Murphy

the Wrestler®

TOP 10

1 EDGE
240, Toronto, Ontario
(–) Smackdown World champion

2 JOHN CENA
260, West Newbury, MA
(1) Raw World champion

3 TAKESHI MORISHIMA
297, Tokyo, Japan
(5) Ring of Honor champion

4 KURT ANGLE
233, Pittsburgh, PA
(9) TNA World champion

5 CHRISTIAN CAGE
225, Toronto, Ontario
(3) No. 1 contender: TNA World title

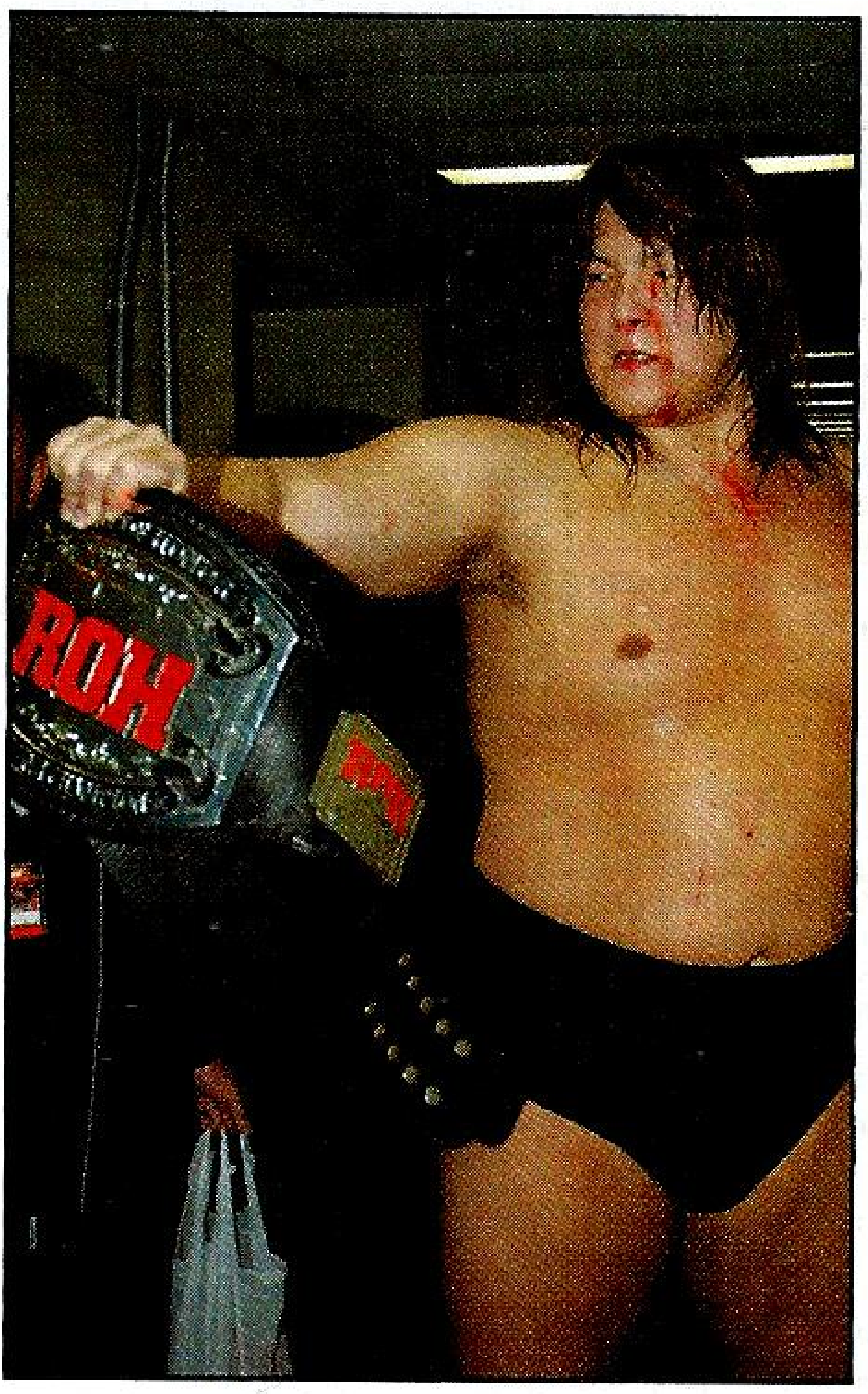
6 MITSUHARU MISAWA
228, Ashikaga, Japan
(–) GHC heavyweight champion

7 BATISTA
318, Washington, DC
(7) No. 1 contender: SD World title

8 YUJI NAGATA
228, Tokyo, Japan
(10) IWGP heavyweight champion

9 MINORU SUZUKI
220, Yokohama, Japan
(8) All Japan Triple Crown champion

10 MVP
252, Miami, FL
(–) WWE U.S. champion


Takeshi Morishima

TAG TEAMS

1 DEUCE & DOMINO
Combined weight: 497 pounds
(3) Smackdown World tag team champions

2 LANCE CADE & TREVOR MURDOCH
Combined weight: 522 pounds
(8) Raw World tag team champions

3 TEAM 3D
Combined weight: 521 pounds
(2) TNA World tag team champions

4 MATT & JEFF HARDY
Combined weight: 425 pounds
(1) No. 1 contenders: Raw World tag team title

5 PAUL LONDON & BRIAN KENDRICK
Combined weight: 380 pounds
(4) No. 2 contenders: Raw World tag team title

6 GIANT BERNARD & TRAVIS TOMKO
Combined weight: 645 pounds
(7) IWGP International tag team champions

7 BRIAN & BRETT MAJOR
Combined weight: 435 pounds
(–) OVW Southern tag team champions

8 JAY & MARK BRISCOE
Combined weight: 385 pounds
(–) Ring of Honor tag team champions

9 HOMICIDE & HERNANDEZ
Combined weight: 495 pounds
(6) No. 1 contenders: TNA World tag team title

10 SHELTON BENJAMIN & CHARLIE HAAS
Combined weight: 480 pounds
(10) No. 3 contenders: Raw World tag team title

WWE RAW

Raw World Champion:
JOHN CENA
(C) 260, West Newbury, MA

1–RANDY ORTON
(–) 245, St. Louis, MO
2–SANTINO MARELLA
(–) 255, Calabria, Italy
3–JEFF HARDY
(4) 212, Cameron, NC
4–CARLITO
(5) 220, San Juan, Puerto Rico
5–BOBBY LASHLEY
(–) 255, Topeka, KS
6–UMAGA
(2) 348, Isle of Samoa
7–KENNY DYKSTRA
(10) 234, Worcester, MA
8–SUPER CRAZY
(–) 215, Mexico City, Mexico
9–KING BOOKER
(–) 250, Houston, TX
10–DAIVARI
(–) 203, Minneapolis, MN

WWE SMACKDOWN

Smackdown World Champion:
EDGE
(–) 240, Toronto, Ontario

1–BATISTA
(1) 318, Washington, DC
2–MVP
(5) 252, Miami, FL
3–FINLAY
(3) 230, Belfast, Ireland
4–MARK HENRY
(–) 372, Silsbee, TX
5–KANE
(6) 326, St. Louis, MO
6–MATT HARDY
(–) 213, Cameron, NC
7–RIC FLAIR
(–) 243, Charlotte, NC
8–CHAVO GUERRERO JR.
(8) 210, El Paso, TX
9–JIMMY WANG YANG
(–) 205, Austell, GA
10–CHUCK PALUMBO
(–) 256, West Warwick, RI

ECW

ECW Champion:
VACANT

1–MARCUS COR VON
(3) 275, Saginaw, MI
2–ELIJAH BURKE
(6) 230, Jacksonville, FL
3–C.M. PUNK
(1) 210, Chicago, IL
4–KEVIN THORN
(7) 270, Memphis, TN
5–THE BOOGEYMAN
(–) 255, parts unknown
6–MATT STRIKER
(8) 215, Bayside, NY
7–TOMMY DREAMER
(10) 265, Yonkers, NY
8–MAHONEY
(9) 361, Nutley, NJ
9–STEVIE RICHARDS
(–) 225, Philadelphia, PA
10–NUNZIO
(–) 209, Howard Beach, NY

TNA

TNA World Champion:
KURT ANGLE
(1) 233, Pittsburgh, PA

1–CHRISTIAN CAGE
(C) 225, Toronto, Ontario
2–STING
(2) 255, Venice Beach, CA
3–JAY LETHAL
(9) 192, Elizabeth, NJ
4–CHRIS SABIN
(3) 207, Detroit, MI
5–SAMOA JOE
(4) 270, Isle of Samoa
6–CHRISTOPHER DANIELS
(7) 210, Los Angeles, CA
7–RHINO
(6) 275, Detroit, MI
8–A.J. STYLES
(8) 202, Gainesville, GA
9–CHRIS HARRIS
(–) 232, Fort Wright, KY
10–BOB BACKLUND
(–) 234, Princeton, MN

OFFICIAL RATINGS

Top 10 and Tag Team ratings are based on won-lost records for the past month, quality of opposition, and inherent skill of each wrestler or team. These ratings are compiled by the magazine's editorial board. All other ratings are based on the official current positions of challengers to the top title in each category; certain titleholders receive an automatic spot in the ratings. The number in parentheses indicates a wrestler's position in that category last issue; (–) indicates that the wrestler was not rated in that category last issue while (C) indicates the wrestler was champion in that category last issue. Note: In an effort to keep the ratings as up-to-date as possible, these pages are often the last to be sent to the printer. Thus, the ratings may reflect changes not reflected in the remainder or the issue.

For period ended June 21, 2007

ACCLAIMED WRESTLING ENTITY: Champion—Scott Fowler; **1**—Patrick Brink; **2**—Rhett Titus; **3**—Ruckus; **4**—Sonjay Dutt; **5**—Petey Williams; **6**—Joseph Brooks; **7**—T.J. Cannon; **8**—Mitch Franklin; **9**—Pelle Primeau; **10**—Bill Bain.

AMERICAN CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Eclipso; **1**—Scott Weddle; **2**—Boris Zhukov; **3**—Hillbilly Helbert; **4**—Foxy Roxy; **5**—Scotty Rocker; **6**—Ken Steel; **7**—Eddie Loco; **8**—BlackHeart; **9**—Joe Poor; **10**—Darius Mackleford.

AMERICAN WRESTLING ASSOCIATION: Champion—Takao Omori; **1**—Kirby Mack; **2**—Steve Corino; **3**—Ricky Landell; **4**—Larry Sweeney; **5**—Chasyn Rance; **6**—T.J. Mack; **7**—Ric Converse; **8**—Sean Davis; **9**—Xrisis; **10**—Phil Davis.

ANARCHY CHAMPIONSHIP WRESTLING: Champion—Jerry Lynn; **1**—Mike Dell; **2**—Showtime Summers; **3**—Darin Childs; **4**—Nigel McGuinness; **5**—Rexx Reed; **6**—Jaykus Plisken; **7**—Claudio Castagnoli; **8**—Rachel Summerlyn; **9**—Skylar Skelly; **10**—Chris Hero.

AWA WORLD-1: Champion—Ricky Landell; **1**—Chasyn Rance; **2**—Francisco Ciatzo; **3**—Scotty Riggs; **4**—Vordell Walker; **5**—Sean Davis; **6**—Phil Davis; **7**—Jack Manley; **8**—Bruce Santee; **9**—Mister Saint Laurent; **10**—Joey Machete.

CAROLINA WRESTLING ENTERTAINMENT: Champion—Bounty Hunter; **1**—Aaron Devil; **2**—Scotty Matthews; **3**—D.J. P Roc; **4**—J. Synn; **5**—Pharoah; **6**—D.Z. Hyde; **7**—Scrapyard Dog; **8**—Leroy Green; **9**—Rick Link; **10**—Josh Hunter.

FULL IMPACT PRO: Champion—Roderick Strong; **1**—Erick Stevens; **2**—Jimmy Rave; **3**—Delirious; **4**—Necro Butcher; **5**—Chasyn Rance; **6**—Sal Rinauro; **7**—Tyler Black; **8**—Sean Waltman; **9**—Kenny King; **10**—Steve Madison.

INTERNATIONAL WRESTLING CARTEL: Champion—Dennis Gregory; **1**—Ricky Reyes; **2**—Samoa Joe; **3**—A.J. Styles; **4**—Larry Sweeney; **5**—Raymond Rowe; **6**—Brent Albright; **7**—John McChesney; **8**—Abyss; **9**—Jon Bolen; **10**—Shiima Xion.

IWA FLASHFIRE: Champion—Lance Christopher; **1**—War Machine Tank; **2**—Nick Hall; **3**—James Boulevard; **4**—Phillip Pain; **5**—Dale Dwindle; **6**—Nitro; **7**—Ronni Rage; **8**—Kell Karnage; **9**—Gravedigger; **10**—Casey J.

MID-STATES WRESTLING: Champion—Kevin Lovejones; **1**—Cast-Iron Cothern; **2**—Jason Jones; **3**—Michael Barry; **4**—Jack Dalton; **5**—Jake Boulder; **6**—Kenny Campbell; **7**—Gary Gram; **8**—Jim Fallon; **9**—Bubba Hall; **10**—Mitch Carter.

NATIONAL WRESTLING LEAGUE: Champion—Gangrel; **1**—Leslie Leatherman; **2**—John Rambo; **3**—Samu; **4**—King Kong Bundy; **5**—Professor Egon Ecton; **6**—Chris Cline; **7**—Brandon Scott; **8**—Cpl. Punishment; **9**—Rocky Dicola; **10**—Christian York.

PRIMAL CONFLICT WRESTLING: Champion—Jimmy Jannetty; **1**—Tommy Hawk; **2**—Switchblade; **3**—Rhino; **4**—Brock Singleton; **5**—Scott Fowler; **6**—Zubov; **7**—Bobby Shields; **8**—Zachary Shane; **9**—Kermon the German; **10**—Julio Dinero.

XCW MIDWEST WRESTLING: Champion—Vacant; **1**—B.J. Whitmer; **2**—Flash Flanagan; **3**—Mitch Ryder; **4**—Bull Pain; **5**—J.C. Ice; **6**—Larry Sweeney; **7**—Todd Morton; **8**—Claudio Castagnoli; **9**—2 Tuff Tony; **10**—Chris Michaels.

RING OF HONOR

ROH Champion:

TAKESHI MORISHIMA

(–) 297, Tokyo, Japan

1–BRENT ALBRIGHT
(1) 230, Bayside, CA

2–RODERICK STRONG
(3) 205, Tampa, FL

3–NIGEL McGUINNESS
(5) 220, London, England

4–DELIRIOUS
(4) 192, parts unknown

5–BRYAN DANIELSON
(–) 185, Aberdeen, WA

6–MATT SYDAL
(6) 177, St. Louis, MO

7–ADAM PEARCE
(7) 233, Chicago, IL

8–NAOMICHI MARUFUJI
(–) 211, Saitama, Japan

9–KENTA
(–) 176, Saitama, Japan

10–CLAUDIO CASTAGNOLI
(9) 238, Schaffhausen, Switz.

OVW

OVW Champion:

JAY BRADLEY

(–) 272, Downers Grove, IL

1–PAUL BIRCHALL
(1) 281, Surrey, England

2–AARON STEVENS
(C) 237, Boston, MA

3–SHAWN SPEARS
(2) 235, Louisville, KY

4–CODY RHODES
(6) 232, Marietta, GA

5–CHET THE JET
(4) 230, Buffalo, NY

6–MIKE KRUEL
(3) 210, New York, NY

7–JOHNNY JETER
(10) 224, San Diego, CA

8–VLADIMIR KOZLOV
(7) 310, Moscow, Russia

9–JACOB DUNCAN
(8) 335, Louisville, KY

10–MIKE MONDO
(9) 185, Long Island, NY

JAPAN

1–MITSUHARU MISAWA
(3) 228, Ashikaga, Japan
GHC heavyweight champion

2–YUJI NAGATA
(2) 228, Tokyo, Japan
IWGP heavyweight champion

3–MINORU SUZUKI
(1) 220, Yokohama, Japan
All Japan Triple Crown champion

4–JUSHIN LIGER
(9) 208, Hiroshima, Japan
Open the Dream Gate champion

5–KENSUKE SASAKI
(–) 251, Tokyo, Japan

6–GENICHIRO TENRYU
(–) 235, Tokyo, Japan

7–YOSHIHIRO TAJIRI
(–) 213, Tokyo, Japan

8–GIANT BERNARD
(–) 353, Boston, MA

9–KEIJI MUTO
(–) 245, Yamanishi, Japan

10–TIGER MASK IV
(–) 170, Uruyasu, Japan

MEXICO

1–MISTICO
(1) 177, Mexico City, Mexico

2–MR. AGUILA
(–) 185, Tijuana, Mexico

3–EL HIJO DEL SANTO
(2) 180, Tulacingo, Mexico

4–CIBERNETICO
(3) 175, Mexico City, Mexico

5–ULTIMO GUERRERO
(–) 210, Gomez Palacio, Mexico

6–NEGRO CASAS
(10) 185, Mexico City, Mexico

7–DR. WAGNER JR.
(6) 215, Mexico City, Mexico

8–L.A. PARK
(9) 235, Torreon, Mexico

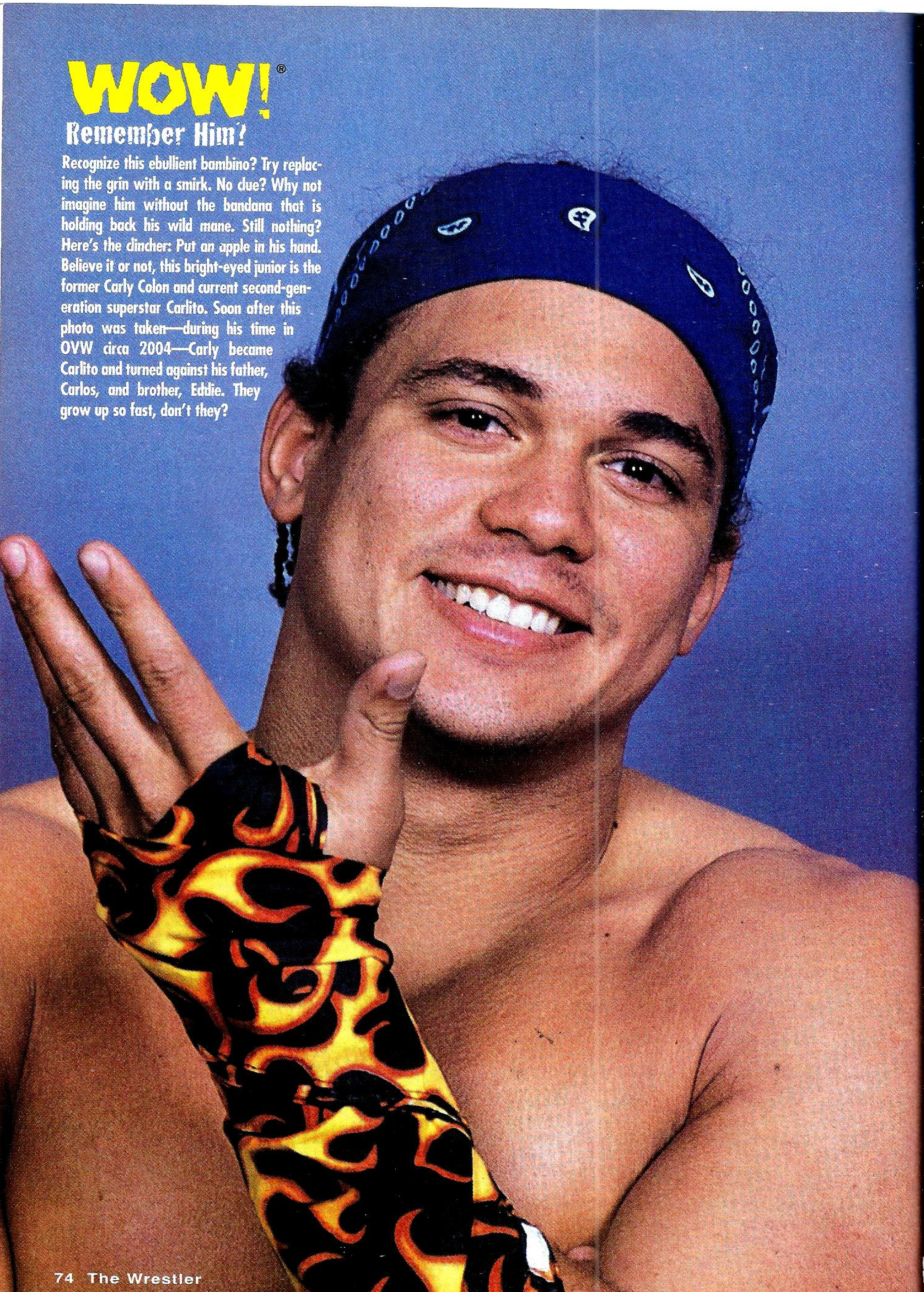
9–ATLANTIS
(4) 180, Guadalajara, Mexico

10–PERRO AGUAYO JR.
(5) 200, Zacatecas, Mexico

WOW!®

Remember Him?

Recognize this ebullient bambino? Try replacing the grin with a smirk. No clue? Why not imagine him without the bandana that is holding back his wild mane. Still nothing? Here's the clincher: Put an apple in his hand. Believe it or not, this bright-eyed junior is the former Carly Colon and current second-generation superstar Carlito. Soon after this photo was taken—during his time in OVW circa 2004—Carly became Carlito and turned against his father, Carlos, and brother, Eddie. They grow up so fast, don't they?



WORLD WRESTLING ENTERTAINMENT
CHAMPION
SANTINO MARELLA

SANTINO MARELLA

WWE Intercontinental champion

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KURT ANGLE

TNA World champion

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

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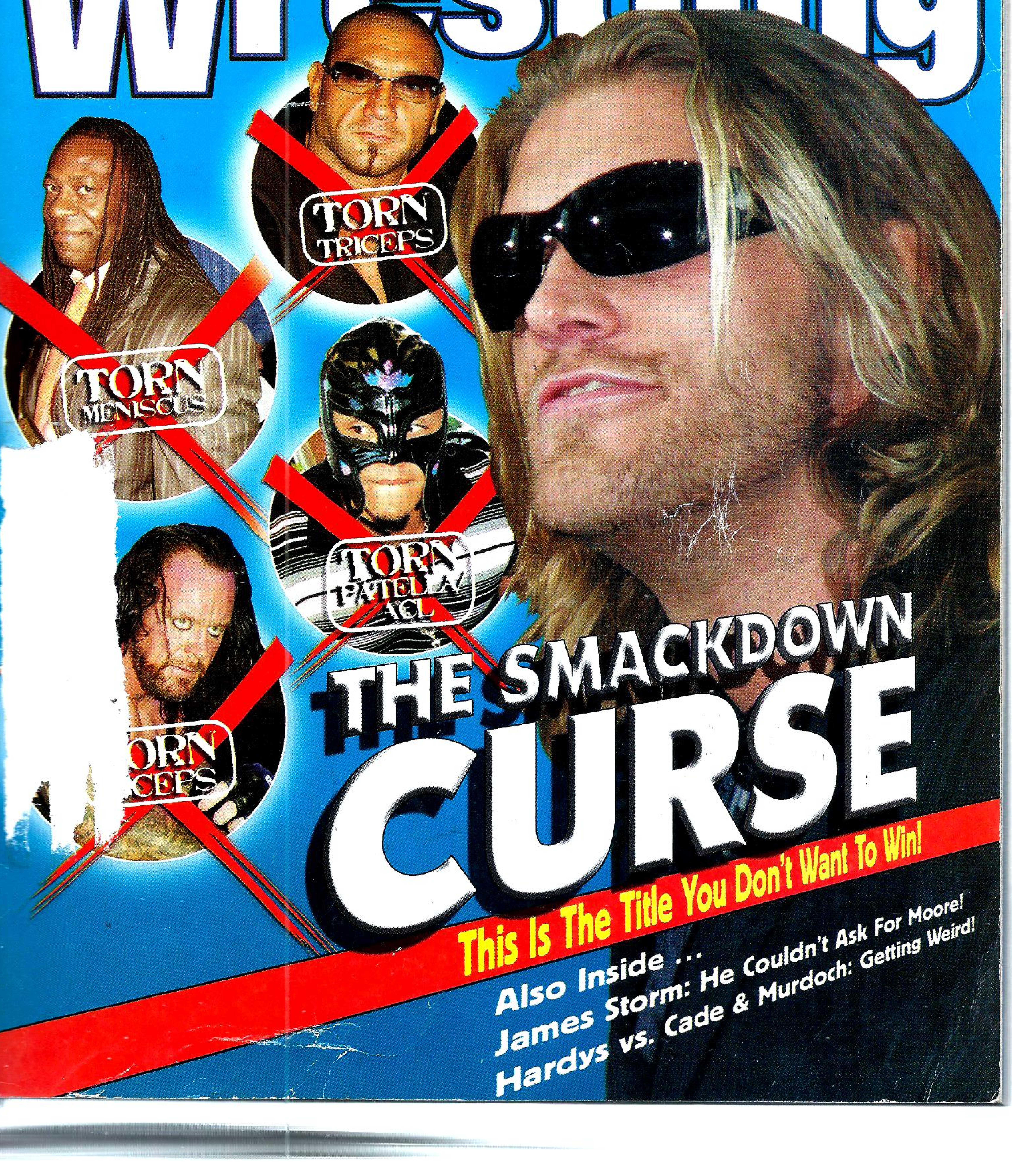
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TORN MENISCUS
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THE SMACKDOWN CURSE

This Is The Title You Don't Want To Win!

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James Storm: He Couldn't Ask For Moore!

Hardys vs. Cade & Murdoch: Getting Weird!

inside wrestling

THE MAGAZINE THAT RIPS THE LID OFF PRO WRESTLING

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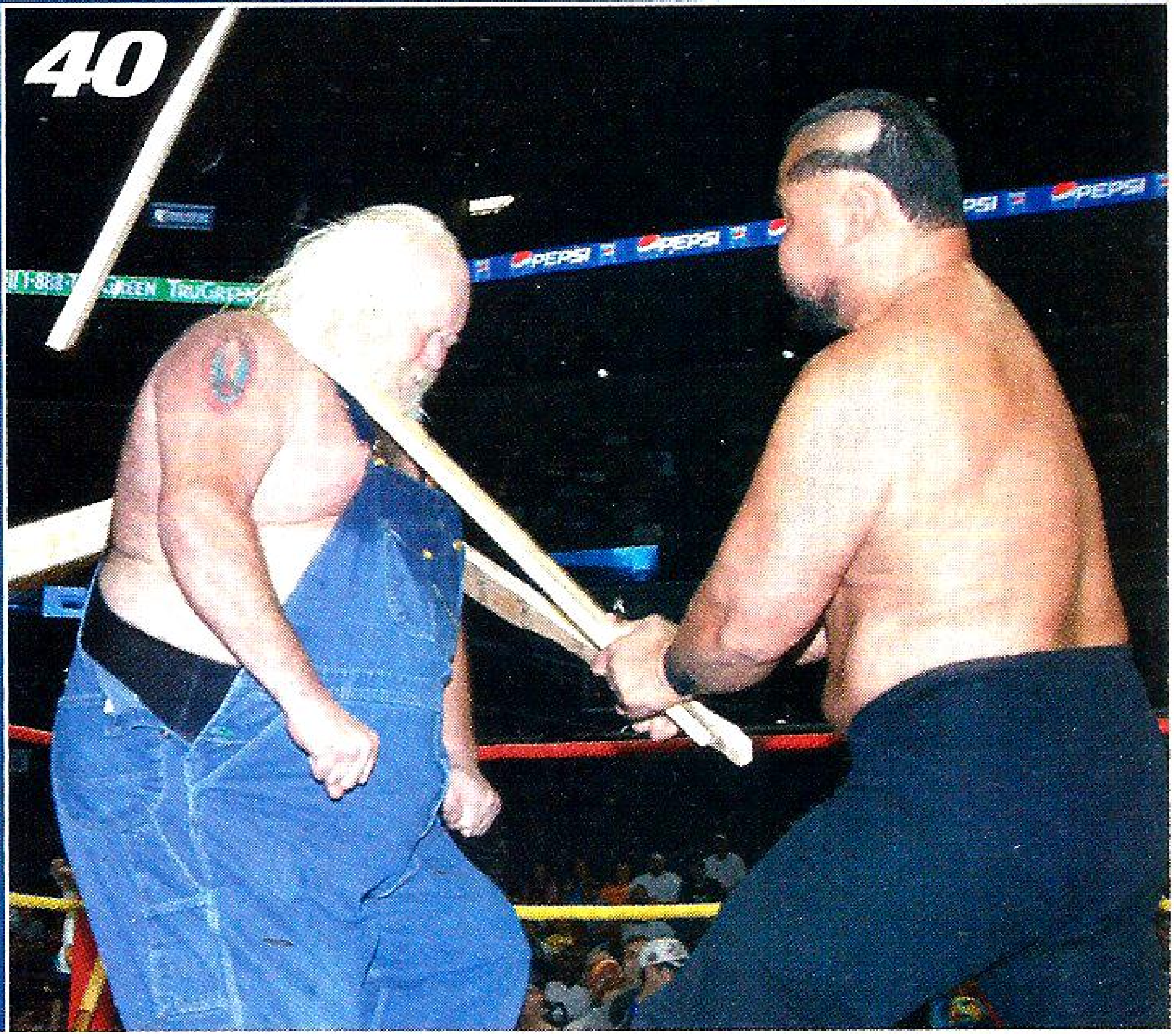
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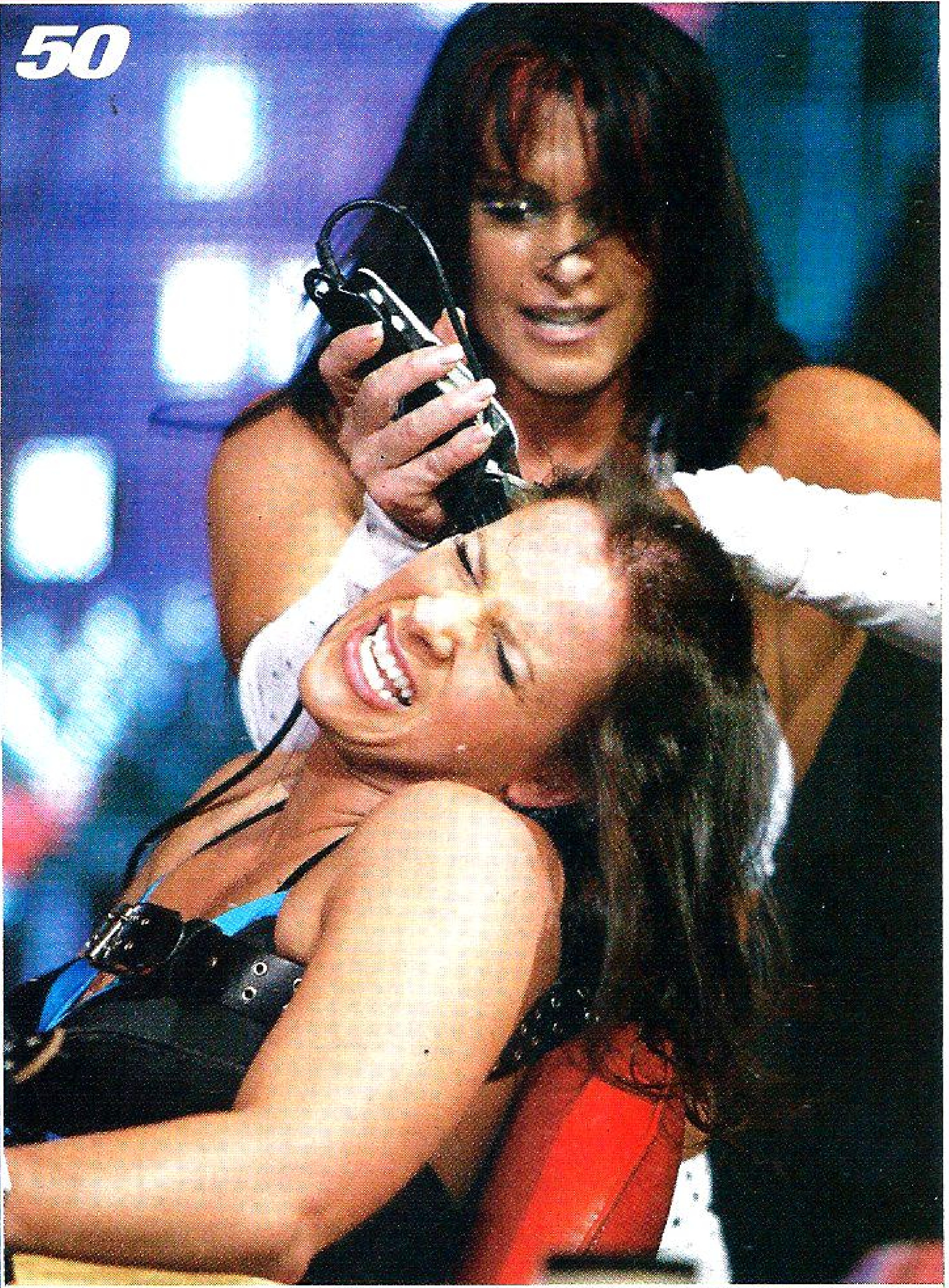
50 ***PREMATURELY BALD! VINCE IS JUST ANOTHER MEMBER OF WRESTLING'S HAIR CLUB FOR LOSERS***
Before Vince McMahon "lost his life," he lost his hair at WrestleMania 23 as the result of Umaga's defeat at the hands of Bobby Lashley. If indeed misery loves company, we're sorry Vinnie Mac didn't get a chance to see this article before, well, you know ...

54 ***HOTSEAT: JOHN CENA***
"I'm the hardest-working guy in WWE"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COVER PHOTOS:
Edge, Batista, King Booker by Stu Saks
Rey Mysterio Jr. by Mike Lano
Undertaker by George Napolitano

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Kevin Boone

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sincerely yours

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FROM THE HORSE'S MOUTH

In the Volume 15, 2007 issue of INSIDE WRESTLING, it shocked me to see a picture of myself, as well as a caption mentioning all of my negative reviews. And, in the May 2007 issue of *Pro Wrestling Illustrated*, it was mentioned that the first thing WSX should do is to get rid of the mind-numbingly annoying ring announcer, Fabian Kaelin.

Why all the hate? The lack of love?

I'll have you know that for every person who hates me on the show, there are 15 more that love me. That stat may be statistically insignificant, but I assure you my polling sources heed to the strictest levels of accuracy control, and that said statistic is indeed statistically true.

But I ask again, why all the hate?

Is it jealousy? Jealousy of the illustrious career I have had? Is it envy of my multiple reality show television experiences? My freestyle rapping abilities? My DVD design skills? Or my appearance as a guest on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*? Is it jealousy of my death-defying wrestling classics, including the 20-foot cage dive at XPW's "Genocide" and the 30-foot sewage bomb at XPW's "Liberty Or Death"? Is it the fact that everyone is jealous that they are not custom "Voice #2" in WWE's video game, *Smackdown vs. Raw 2006*, for the PS2? Is it because I was viewed as such a threat by WWE that I was fired from doing motion capture work for *Smackdown vs. Raw 2008* because of my involvement in WSX?

I've experienced hate from the wrestling critics since my start in wrestling back in 1999, and that was because I annoyed people. Why? Because they couldn't believe that such a small, weasel-like, arrogant, and energetic 5'4" loud mouth could stir up so much drama, and then back it up with skill.

I am an enigmatic expression of energy, and I always explode with a concussion bomb of charisma. I hold a bachelor's degree of science in the field of broadcast journalism. I am the most creatively progressive mind this business has yet to fully experience, and my legacy will leave me known as the pop superstar, crossover, mainstream media sensation, the one, the only, future hall of famer and world's greatest hype man, Fabian Kaelin.

FABIAN KAELIN
Fabian@realityryan.com

Wrestling Society X came and went in only a few months time. Some placed some of the blame on the eccentric ring announcer known as Fabian Kaelin. We never expected Kaelin to write in to assure us that WSX may be gone, but he's here to stay!

Since the birth of TNA, critics have lauded the company for the high-flying, cruiserweight-style X division. But reader David Whitley says that little guys don't have what it takes to be superstars. He credits heavyweights like Samoa Joe for keeping the promotion afloat.

A BANG-UP ANGLE

Wow! I still can't believe they killed off Mr. McMahon. But then again, maybe they didn't. Maybe he'll come back when we all least expect it and drop a major bombshell on us all! Maybe he'll come back with Triple-H when HHH recovers from his injury, or maybe he'll let the family fight over the company before returning from the dead. The possibilities are endless! I can't wait to see where they go with this, but one thing is certain: McMahon will be back. I've been waiting for another great angle, something that would surprise us all and change everything, and WWE finally pulled through.

PAUL FARRELL
Marietta, GA

UNDERTAKING INSPIRATION

I am 17 years old, and I have wanted to be a professional wrestler ever since WrestleMania XIII, when The Undertaker beat "Psycho" Sid Vicious for the WWF World title. The Undertaker has always been my favorite wrestler, so I loved seeing the cover story you did on his WrestleMania streak (INSIDE WRESTLING/*The Wrestler*, Vol. 16, 2007). I can't believe 'Taker has been able to go strong for 15 straight 'Manias. I just hope, considering his recent injuries, that he can continue the streak.

I will graduate from high school next year and hopefully begin my career in the business. The Undertaker is my biggest inspiration, and, while I will probably never have the honor of wrestling against him and will likely never hold a world championship belt, it's great to know he will still be inspiring hundreds more wrestlers for WrestleManias to come.

DAVE PARFIT
Alstead, NH

HATING ON THE LITTLE GUYS

Cruiserweights are just a fad. They are boring and all they have going for them is that they are acrobats. Wrestling needs more heavyweight superstars and monster heels; wrestling doesn't need any more dull acrobats.

How many of these guys are high-flyers? The Rock, Austin, Flair, Hogan, Sting, Big Show, Triple-H, Undertaker, Cena, Batista, Savage, Samoa Joe, the Von Erichs, Foley, Kane, Race, Angle, Steamboat, and Goldberg. The dirt sheets are always saying TNA should push the X division, but if TNA didn't have Joe, Sting, Angle, Steiner, Jarrett, and Christian, they would wind up like WSX.

Think about this: How many cruiserweights in wrestling right now will be the next champion superstar? What kind of buy rate would a cruiserweight-vs.-cruiserweight main event get? What kind of TV rating would you get with an all cruiserweight roster? Cruiserweights should be treated like the women and midgets: as novelty acts.

DAVID WHITLEY
Washington, NC □

names makin' news

By Harry Burkett

SHERRI MARTEL, ONE of the most accomplished female wrestlers and managers in wrestling history, was found dead on June 2 at her mother's home in Birmingham, Alabama. She was 49. Police were still investigating her death as of press time, which indicates that she most likely did not die of natural causes, although no one has suggested there was foul play.

Martel was a beloved figure among her peers in the wrestling business, as evidenced by the tremendous outpouring of sympathy regarding her shocking death. Her pioneering career spanned nearly three decades, and she worked for every major promotion in North America.

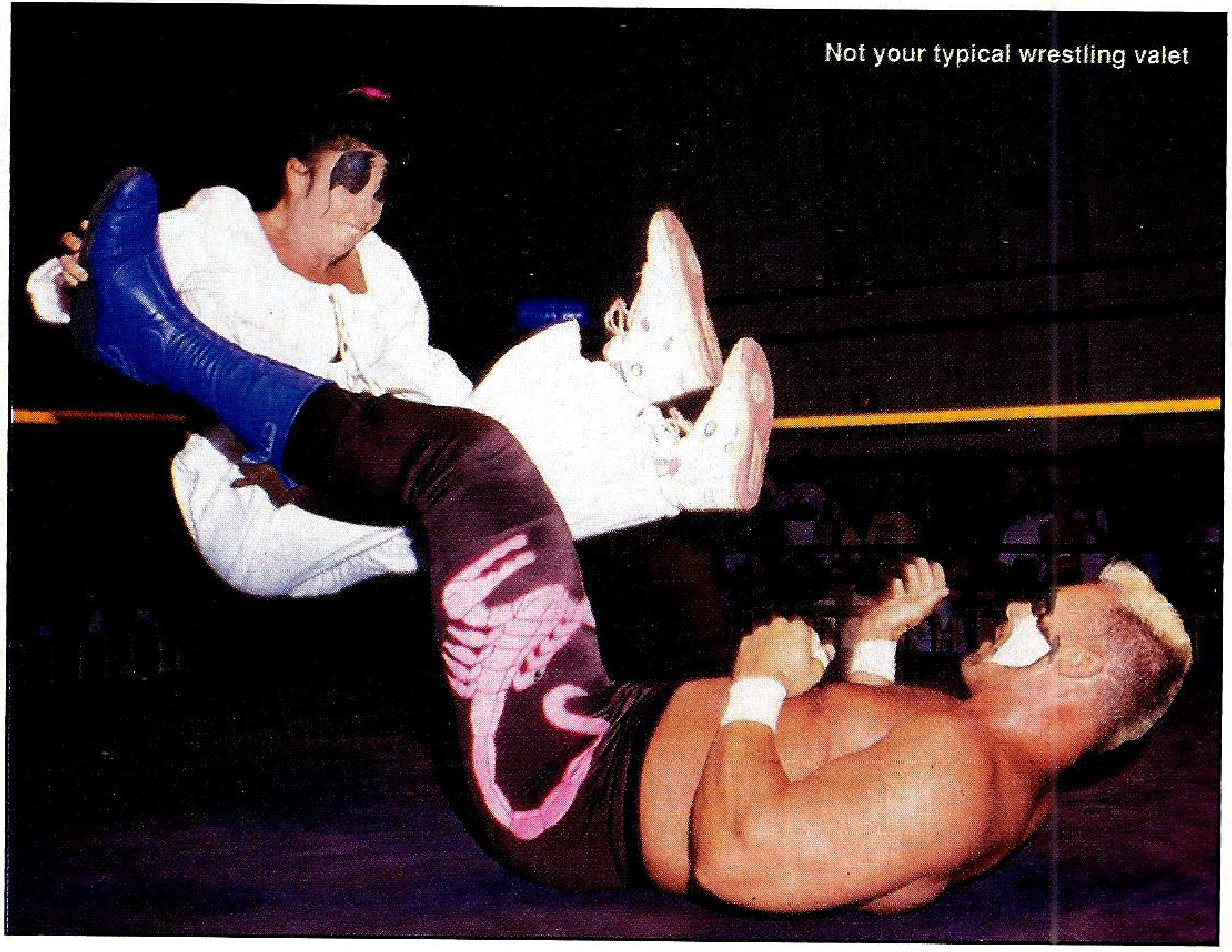
"Sherri was one of the most talented and colorful performers I ever worked with or knew in this business," commented **Jim Ross** on his website, jrsbarbq.com. "She was not only an excellent wrestler, but evolved into one of the best manager/valets ever in the business. Her physicality and toughness may never be matched, especially for her gender ... She could out-drink, out-cuss, and out-party most men, and I would venture to say, in a fistfight, she could whip more wrestlers than one could ever imagine."

Considering the New Orleans native's vivacious personality, it's no wonder that she literally ran away to join the circus when she was a teenager. After being told there were no openings, she returned home. But Sherri, her sister, and her mother often attended matches in Hattiesburg, Mississippi. She soon realized that wrestling was the next best thing to the circus. Sherri enrolled in a training school in Memphis in 1978 and received further tutelage from **The Fabulous Moolah** in 1979. She debuted in 1980.

Martel got her big break in the AWA, where she defeated **Candi Devine** for the first of four AWA women's championships in 1985. She also honed her skills as a manager, guiding the careers of then-AWA World tag team champions **Buddy Rose** and **Doug Somers**, as well as **Kevin Kelly**.

Interestingly, Martel also has the unique distinction of holding major championships in two companies at once. She was still the AWA women's champion when she signed with the WWF in 1987. Billed as **Sensational Sherri**, she beat Moolah for the WWF women's championship on July 24 of that year, and the AWA eventually stripped her of its title. Her managing career took priority over her in-ring career in 1989, as she became the full-time manager of **Randy Savage**. When Savage became known as the "Macho King," Martel became—quite fittingly—Sensational Queen Sherri.

Because Martel had a keen interest in hair styling, she eventually left the WWF to attend cosmetology school while keeping a busy schedule of independent dates. Over the next couple of years, she appeared regularly in Smoky Mountain Wrestling, ECW, and WCW for brief periods. She eventually signed on with WCW full-time in 1995 and went on to manage World heavy-



Not your typical wrestling valet

weight champion **Ric Flair** and World tag team champions **Harlem Heat**. As in the WWF, Sherri's idea of outside interference in WCW was not hitting a foe with a high-heeled shoe or loaded purse. Top-rope legdrops and splashes were more her forte.

Martel was inducted into the WWE Hall of Fame in 2006. Her final high-profile appearance occurred in TNA, where she was one of several former managers to offer her services to **Robert Roode**.

Perhaps former wrestler and current WWE official **Tom Prichard** said it best: "She was such a down-to-earth, nice person, and, if she was your friend, you had a friend forever."

Now we go from an all-too-real death to a fake death, that of **Vincent Kennedy McMahon**. (No, he doesn't deserve a full-color pin-up.) WWE launched one of its most ambitious angles ever on the June 11 edition of Raw, when McMahon climbed into his limousine, which was promptly blown to smithereens. So now the mystery persists: Who killed Vince McMahon?

Although WWE's website claims federal authorities are looking into the matter, local authorities have gone out of their way to emphasize that the blow-up of VKM was only part of a storyline. The Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, police department issued this statement a few days later: "For verification purposes regarding those inquiring as to the alleged car bombing of WWE Chairman Vince McMahon at the Wachovia Arena in Wilkes-Barre township on Monday, June 11, 2007, the incident was a staged event, prearranged with fire department personnel and authorized by township code enforcement officials."

Believe it or not, local television stations in the area received hundreds of calls from WWE fans asking if the explosion—and the apparent murder of McMahon—were real. Regardless of your opinion of whether this storyline is in bad taste, it did spike ECW's rating to 1.7 the following night, a 15 percent increase.

The very first TNA World champion was crowned on June 17 at Slammiversary, held in Nashville, Tennessee. **Kurt Angle** bested **Christian Cage**, **A.J. Styles**, **Samoa Joe**, and **Chris Harris** to win a convoluted "King Of The Mountain" match and become the first TNA champ.

Remember, the rules for the "King Of The Mountain" match dictate that the wrestler who climbs a ladder and places the title belt on a hook hanging from the rafters is declared the winner. If a wrestler is pinned or submits during the match, then he must spend two minutes in the penalty box outside the ring. *Whew!*

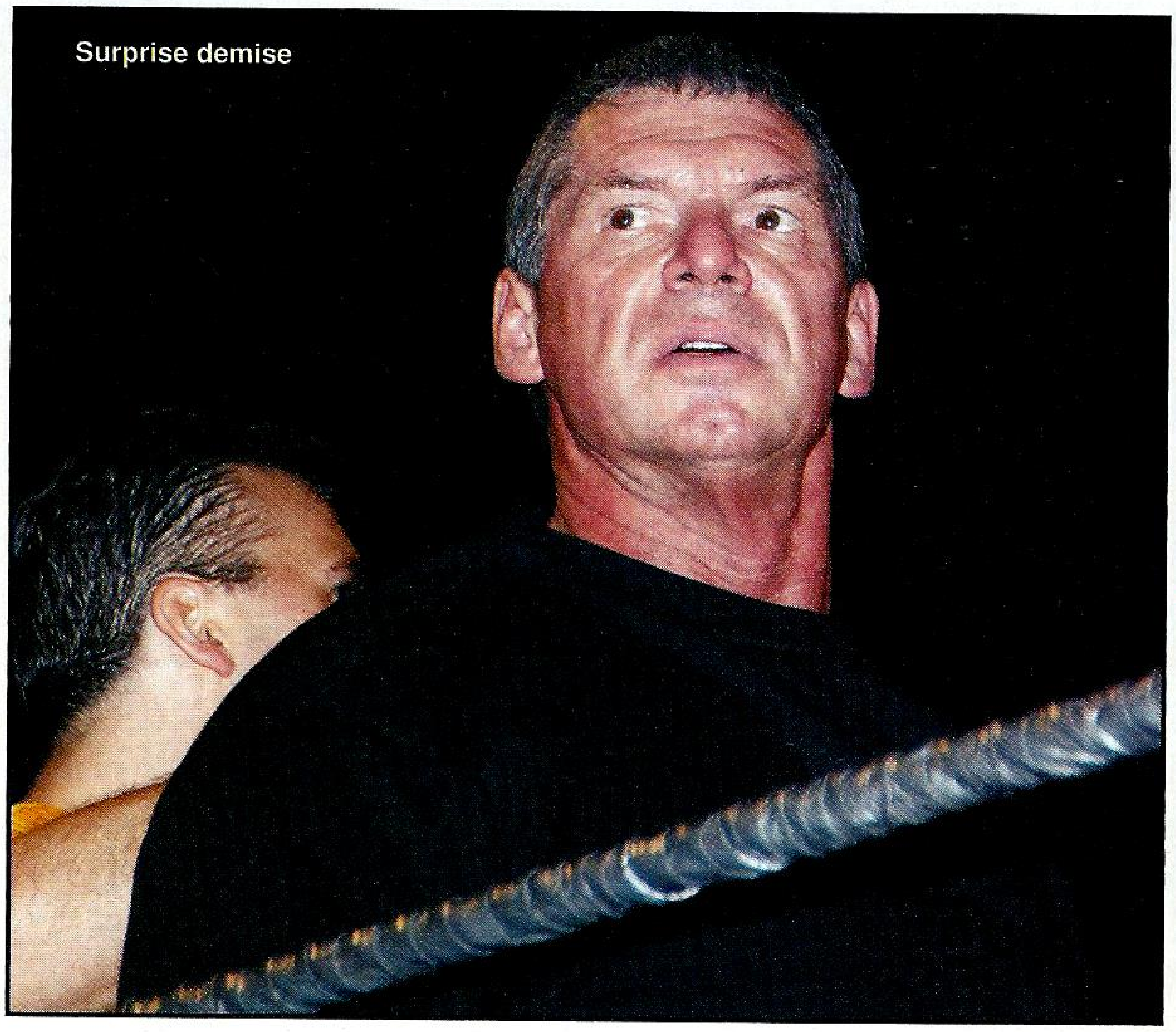
The match was action-packed nonetheless. For a moment, it seemed as if Harris was about to pull an upset when he knocked everyone down with the ladder and began to climb with the belt. Cagey Christian managed to shove Harris off and ram him with the ladder. While Cage was climbing the ladder with the belt, Angle grabbed his leg and clamped on the anklelock. Angle wrested the belt away from Cage, and Harris speared Cage off the ladder. Thanks to Harris' intervention, Angle finished climbing the ladder and placed the belt on the hook to win the match.

Samoa Joe offered to shake Angle's hand after the match, but the new champion kicked Joe in the midsection and planted him with an Olympic slam.

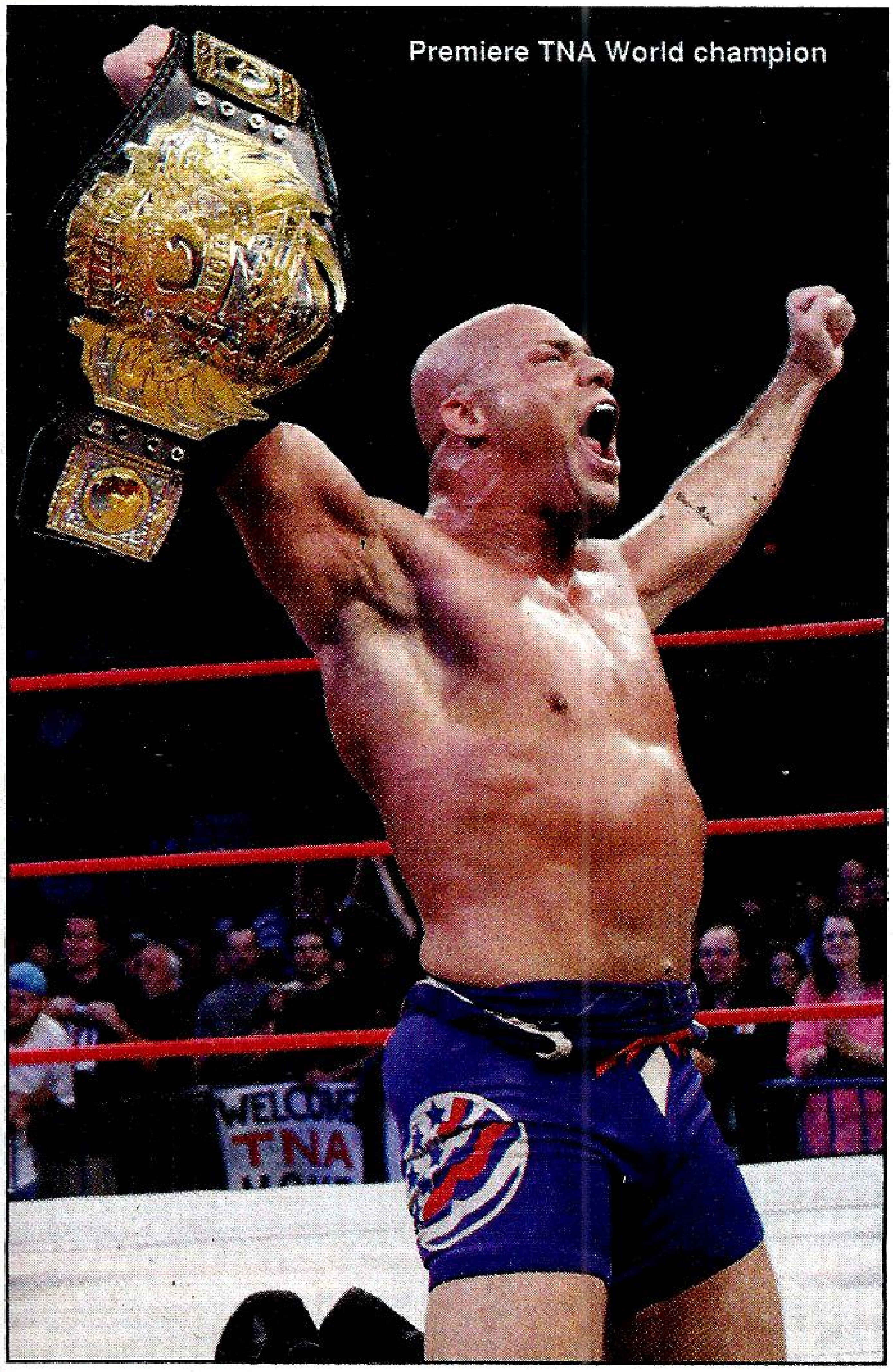
Congratulations go out to **Jay Lethal**, who defeated **Chris Sabin** for the X division title at the pay-per-view. In perhaps the best high-impact match of the night, Sabin dominated the opening minutes, and, as the match progressed, it became an even battle. Lethal caught Sabin with a crescent kick, which helped set up "Black Machismo's" elbowdrop off the top rope. Somehow, the simplest move of the match seemed to be the most awkward for Lethal to execute. But that didn't matter, as Lethal still scored the pinfall over Sabin to win the X division belt.

NFL star **Frank Wychek** turned in an admirable performance when he teamed with **Jerry Lynn** to defeat **James Storm** and **Ron Killings** at Slammiversary. The former Tennessee Titan utilized some solid bodyslams and dropkicks before executing a cradle piledriver—no doubt taught to him by Lynn—to pin Storm. The match transpired after Storm spat beer in Wychek's face during a Slammiversary press conference in Nashville.

Also at Slammiversary, **Abyss** beat



Surprise demise


Premiere TNA World champion

Travis Tomko in a no-disqualification match ... **Sting** pinned **Christopher Daniels** ... TNA World tag team champions **Team 3D** defeated **Rick Steiner** & **Road Warrior Animal** (substituting for an injured **Scott Steiner**) ... **Eric Young** pinned Robert Roode to earn his "freedom" ... **B.G. James** and **Kip James** beat **Basham** & **Damaja** ... **Bob Backlund**—at 58 years of age—pinned **Alex Shelley** ... **Rhino** & **Senshi** beat **The Latin American Exchange**.

How's this for a transposition? Former Deep South star **Bradley Jay** is now known as **Jay Bradley** ... and he's the new Ohio Valley champion. Bradley upset **Paul Birchall** for the title on June 1 in Louisville, but at least on one occasion, Birchall came very close to regaining the belt. During a recent televised match, Birchall was about to finish off Bradley with his patented jumping neckbreaker when former champ **Aaron Stevens** smashed Bradley in the face with OVW title belt. I expect these three guys to face one another in a triple-threat match before the end of OVW's "Summer Sizzler Series."

In addition to the Ohio Valley heavyweight title change, **ODB** regained the women's title from **Katie Lea** on June 1, and **The Major Brothers** defeated **Charles Evans** and **Justin LaRoche** for the Southern tag team belts on June 15.

NEWS ANALYSIS

ALL HAIL THE QUEEN. I became a fan of Sherri Martel during her feud with Candi Devine. I remember her yelling at the men in the crowd, "I know you want me, but you can't have me!" But she was the opposite of that brash and sassy persona in real life. At an indy show I attended about five years ago, Sherri made a point to hug every person backstage before she left the building. She was a classy and caring person.

THE VINCE BLOW-UP. Why do I get the feeling that Vince McMahon is going to return with an eye-tuck, and maybe a nip-and-tuck around the neck? Come on, Vince managed to build an entire WrestleMania storyline around a simple haircut. He's going to say that he needed plastic surgery after suffering severe burns in the explosion. And, by the way, if Triple-H and Stephanie aren't revealed as the culprits, this angle will be a dud.

NO NWA IN TNA. Although I'm a traditionalist, I was not the least bit bothered by the NWA withdrawing its recognition of TNA stars as its champions. I'm glad to see Kurt Angle as the TNA World champion and Team 3D as the TNA World tag team champions. TNA no longer needed to depend on the legacy of an organization that saw its best days 25 years ago. TNA deserves a chance to establish its own legacy, and this is a major step.

COOL IT, KURT. Judging by recent events, one might think that Batista and John Cena vs. Kurt Angle and Ron Killings would be available on pay-per-view in the near future. Cena and Killings have engaged in trash talk at two airports at this point, and Angle continues to bad-mouth Batista. Of course, Batista and Cena are being smart by not responding publicly to anything that Angle or Killings has to say.

END OF AN ERA. The Pacific Northwest promotion was one of the last holdouts of the territorial era, and it seems that Sandy Barr's death—at least in a symbolic sense—puts a period on that chapter of wrestling history. Barr made a living as a wrestler, referee, trainer, and promoter without having to move from the Portland area. Wrestling was part of the local community in those days, and part of me is sorry those days are over.

Ring of Honor champion **Takeshi Morishima** has been so successful in his defenses throughout the U.S. that I'm starting to wonder when he's going to apply for American citizenship. In one weekend alone, Morishima defeated ROH tag champ **Jay Briscoe** in Roxbury Crossing, Massachusetts, and then beat FIP champ **Roderick Strong** in Philadelphia. This guy really is the Japanese **Terry Gordy**.

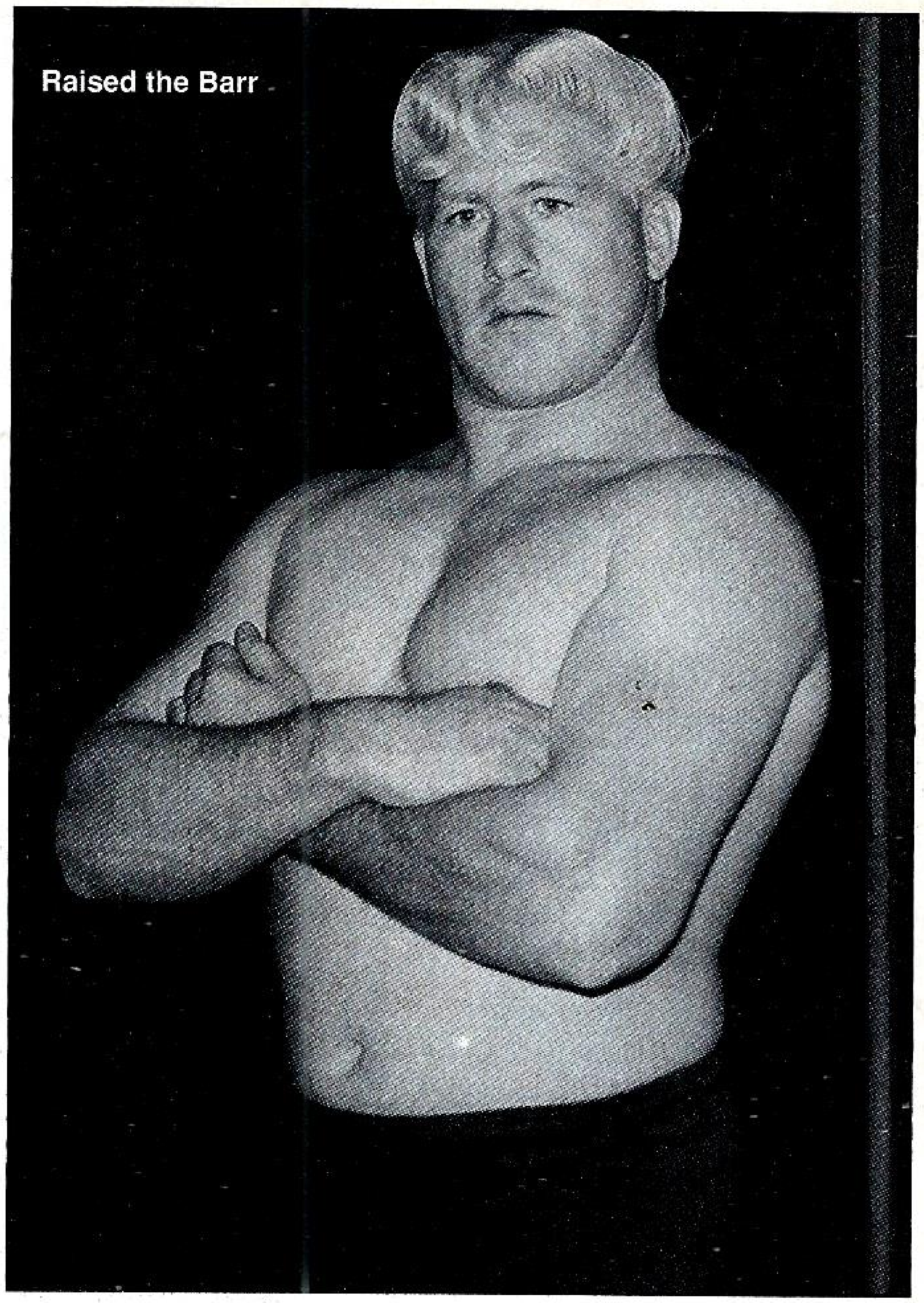
News from Jersey All-Pro Wrestling: JAPW champion **Low-Ki** (Senshi) defeated fellow TNA star A.J. Styles on June 9 in Rahway, New Jersey ... **Homicide**, a longtime staple of JAPW, has persuaded his LAX running buddy, **Hernandez**, to make some appearances with him ... **Slyk Wagner Brown**, a fixture in JAPW for the past decade, is continuing his winning ways, most recently defeating **Deranged**.

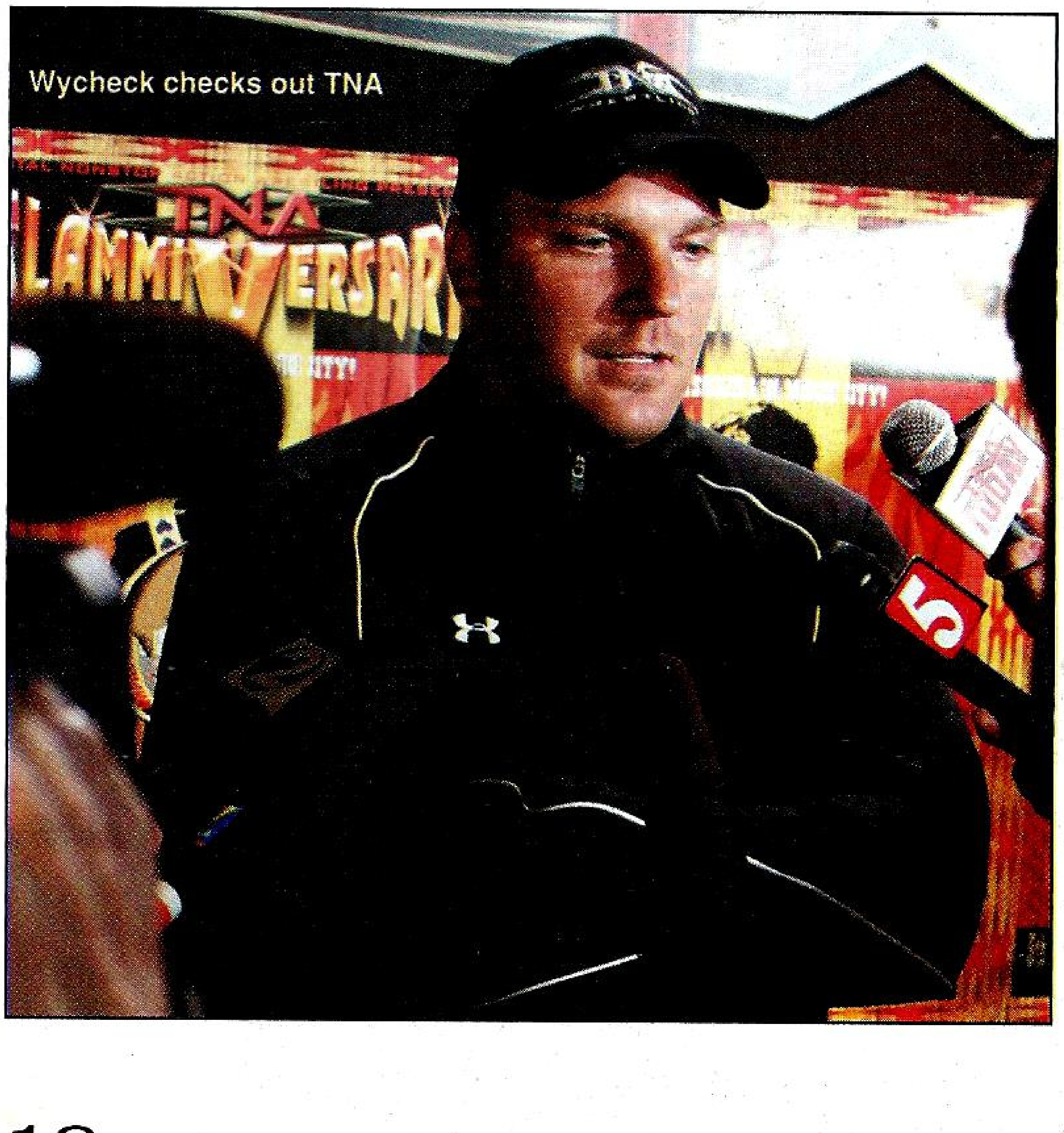
This 'n' that: Smackdown scored a 2.6 despite the final appearance of **Bob Barker** on *The Price Is Right* on CBS, which falls in line with the blue brand's ratings as of late ... **The Undertaker** is exploring real estate opportunities in Colorado ... **Stacy Keibler** recently volunteered her services for private dance lessons to help raise funds for agencies providing healthcare, housing, and youth services for the underserved in California ... Even the harshest critics of **Jeff Jarrett** have praised his tasteful tribute to his late wife, **Jill Jarrett**, in a pretaped interview segment at Slammiversary.

From the Batista-Hater Dept.: With his TNA World title victory, Kurt Angle probably feels like he's one-upped **Batista**, whom he continues to disparage during interviews. While appearing on 104.5 FM in Nashville, Angle said TNA wouldn't be interested in Batista because he "can't wrestle or talk" and would have a "short career" anyway. He also mentioned that Raw World champion **John Cena** had a limited skill set, but was slowly maturing into his role.

Before we part, I'd like to pay tribute to **Sandy Barr**, who died recently at the age of 69. Barr broke into the business in 1957, battling Treach Phillips Sr. to a draw in Hot Springs, Idaho. Barr went on to spend most of his career in the western U.S. and Canada.

But Barr enjoyed his greatest prominence in the Pacific Northwest, where the sandy-haired fan favorite utilized a high-flying repertoire to become a main-eventer. At a relatively young age, Barr became a referee in the Northwest in order to spend more time with his family.


Raised the Barr


Wycheck checks out TNA

In addition to being a wrestler, referee, and even a promoter, Barr trained **Matt Borne**, as well as female wrestlers **Velvet McIntyre** and **Princess Victoria**, just to name a few. Of course, his prized pupils were his sons, **Jesse** and **Art Barr**. Jesse became a top star in the Northwest and Florida and wrestled as **Jimmy Jack Funk** in the WWF in the mid-1980s. Art—known for his innovative, aerial style—also wrestled in the Northwest, but enjoyed his greatest fame in Mexico, where he and **Eddie Guerrero** became top-drawing rudos. Art died of a drug overdose in 1987.

The elder Barr remained a fixture, however, refereeing matches for promoter **Don Owen** into the early-1990s. Years earlier, when Owen bought an old bowling alley and converted it in to what would become the famous Portland Sports Arena, he allowed Barr to establish what would become a renowned flea market. Barr died of a heart attack at his flea market on June 2.

My condolences go to Barr's family and friends. The Portland legend will be missed greatly. ☐

JIMMY WANG YANG

HEIGHT: 5'9"
WEIGHT: 205
HOMETOWN: Austell, GA

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE: May 25, 2007—defeating WWE cruiserweight champion Chavo Guerrero Jr. in a non-title match on Smackdown. Yang had already beaten Guerrero in non-title matches at several house shows, but—with millions of people watching—this was his highest-profile victory ever.

HE DOES IT SO WELL: This man is a natural entertainer, something that fans wouldn't have realized during his previous stints in WWE, WCW, and Ring of Honor. Inspired by Dusty Rhodes, Yang has gotten some giddy-up in his gallop, willing to do a two-step at the drop of a Stetson.

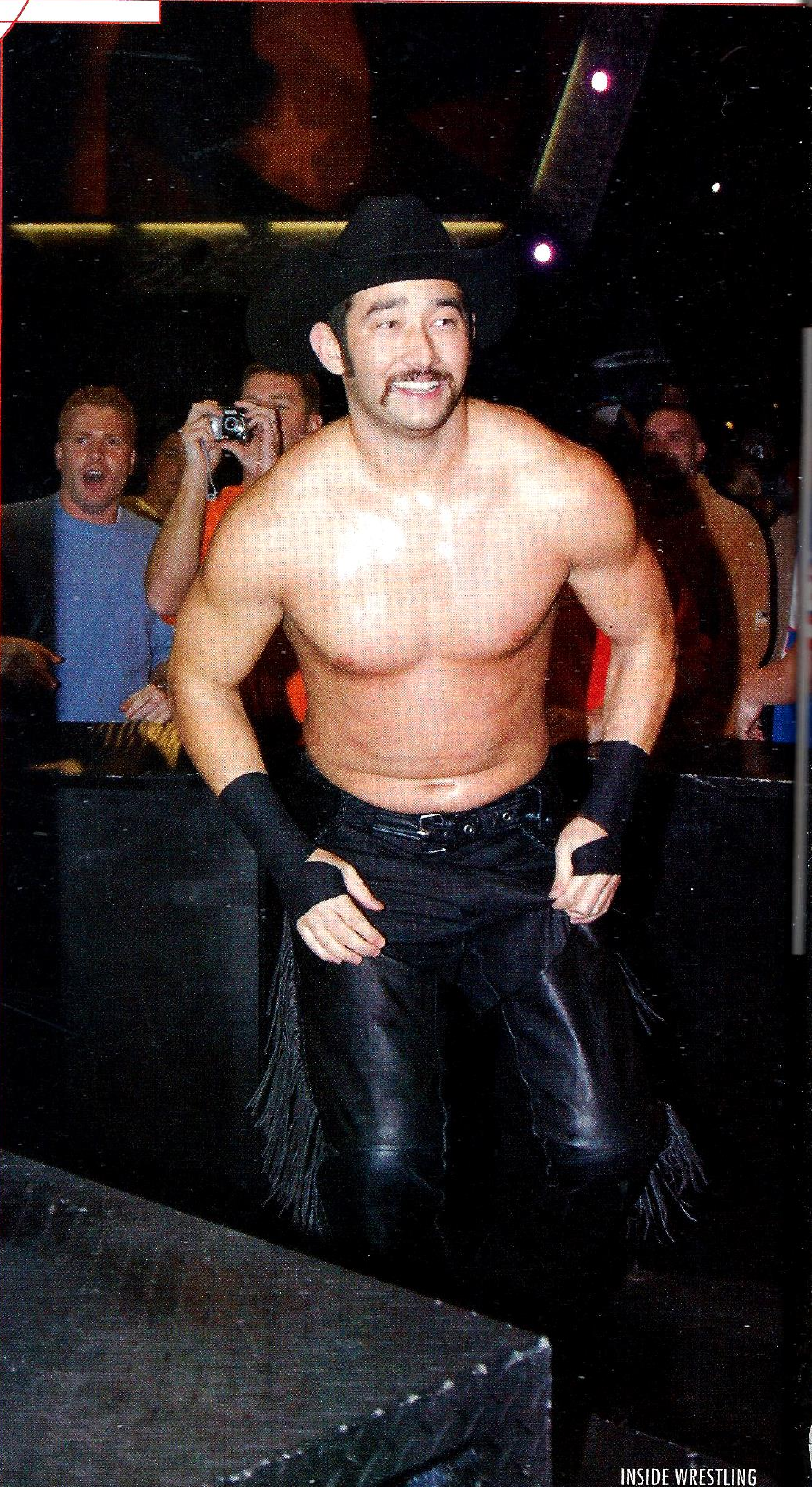
WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE: Yang isn't concerned enough with winning matches, and, as a result, doesn't display enough aggression in the ring. After beating Guerrero so many times, he should have slammed his fist on Smackdown GM Theodore Long's desk and demanded title matches. Something tells us that he didn't bother.

PET FINISHER: Moonsault

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: The Japanese Georgian finally became the official top contender to Guerrero's cruiserweight title by winning a four-way match also involving Daivari, Shannon Moore, and Jamie Noble at the June 12 taping of Smackdown. Those 3-1 odds were not easy to overcome.

OUTLOOK FOR 2007: Yang is the hottest-rising cruiserweight on Smackdown right now. With Daivari traded to Raw, and Guerrero, Moore, and Noble seeming like old news, he is the fresh talent the division has needed for years.

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: "I had great matches with Jimmy and Jamie in WCW, when they were The Jung Dragons, and I know Jimmy has tremendous talent. He also has that intangible element: momentum. With me out of action, he should dominate this year." —Gregory Helms



ALEX SHELLEY

HEIGHT: 5'10"
WEIGHT: 199
HOMETOWN: Detroit, MI

GREATEST MOMENT TO DATE: May 22, 2004—forming Generation Next with Austin Aries, Roderick Strong, and Jack Evans at a Ring of Honor show that was appropriately titled "Generation Next." Shelley and company went on to target wrestlers they thought respected tradition. It wasn't his most redeeming moment, but it put him in the spotlight.

HE DOES IT SO WELL: He is one of the biggest troublemakers in wrestling today. In Ring of Honor, he spearheaded vicious attacks on Rick Steamboat and Bryan Danielson. In TNA, his video camera has caused problems with Sting and Team 3D. Shelley doesn't hesitate to go after wrestling's biggest stars.

WHERE HE NEEDS TO IMPROVE: He's always made the perfect dance partner, but has never become the star of the ballroom. Against Shelley, wrestlers such as Chris Sabin, Petey Williams, and Jay Lethal have had terrific matches that have helped them become bigger stars. When is Shelley going to win the TNA X division title?

PET FINISHER: Swinging reverse STO

BIGGEST TEST TO DATE: In the ring against a former WWF champion at Slammiversary, Shelley failed miserably. Shelley had barely applied an armbar when Bob Backlund slammed him, executed a double-underhook suplex and an atomic drop, and bridged the Detroit native for the pinfall. How can he explain a loss to a 58-year-old man?

OUTLOOK FOR 2007: Now that X division coach Kevin Nash has transformed Jay Lethal into "Black Machismo" and Sonjay Dutt into a meditation guru, why can't he think of something for Shelley? He is definitely a man in search of a gimmick.

QUICKIE EXPERT ANALYSIS: "Alex has the skills, but he lacks the fire, the intensity. He needs to set up that camera to film some of his matches. He should stop being a smart aleck, and start getting smart about where he's going with his career." —Hector Guerrero

on the road

With Dave Lenker

WHERE DO YOU see yourself in 10 years? It's the kind of question you might get asked on a first date, in a job interview, or in any other situation when another person wants to put you on the spot with an open-ended query that, if answered honestly, can reveal a lot about you. You can substitute one, five, 20, or any other number for 10 and have it work just as well.

If you're a little sneaky, you can try asking the question to your significant other to see if he or she sees you at his or her side when painting that future mental picture for you. If you're not part of the frame, maybe you ought to re-evaluate that relationship.

For better or for worse, I suppose I'm just not much of a long-term planner, as I'm not very good at answering questions like that. I proved it again when it came up during a recent lunch conversation I had with a friend of mine. Uncomfortable silence. Blank stare.

Wrestling against Freakin' Deacon in an opening bout may not have been where Val Venis thought he'd end up, but he's still on the WWE payroll, and not too many wrestlers can say that after 10 years.

Put the question in reverse and I can tell you that on this night 20 years ago, I was a soon-to-be freshman in college intent on pursuing my bachelor's degree in biology at Lafayette College in Easton, Pennsylvania. Wrestling wasn't really in the one-, five, 10-, or 20-year plans at the time.

This does get back to wrestling, believe it or not.

The question was still on my mind as I drove here, there, and everywhere in visiting family all over the great state of Virginia in mid-May, a voyage whose last leg took me to not-so-lovely Hampton, the site of the last Raw before Judgment Day. A momentum-challenged Carlito needed a punching bag in advance of his Judgment Day appointment with Ric Flair that night, and whose services should be volunteered by Creative that night but those of Val Venis?

The Big Valbowski got a little offense in—*surprise!*—before surrendering to Carlito's backstabber.

A quick check of my already-dog-eared copy of *PWI's 2007 Wrestling Almanac* later that evening confirmed that it had been almost 10 full years since, with the "Attitude" era in WWE just shifting into second gear, we were introduced to the risqué vignettes hailing the arrival of this supposed former adult film star. If double-entendres titillated you back then, well, Venis was your hero.

I wondered if anyone, back in 1997, asked Sean Morley, the man behind the Venis persona, where he thought he'd be in 10 years. I find that question interesting in this case because you can look at the career of someone such as Venis in at least two vastly different ways.

GOLD TUR
I NEED VALAGRA
V/V

Life was good for Val Venis when Terri Runnels soothed his pain and the fans took the time to make signs in his "honor." But that was a long time ago. Expectations for Val have been lowered—and that may not be a bad thing.

Had you asked him in a public forum, perhaps with a camera or microphone in front of him, he probably would have spewed the typical multiple-time world champion type of answer. You know, the hopes-and-dreams kind of answer that you have to give. (Heck, if you were asked with your boss watching where you saw yourself professionally in 10 years, you'd probably give an optimistic, politically correct answer as well.)

Had you asked him in a more private, off-the-record kind of setting, he might have told you he'd be happy just to still be with WWE in 2007. To me, that would have been an admirable goal. Just for the heck of it, I reviewed the results of the three WWE pay-per-views that took place during the summer of 1997. All of three wrestlers who appeared on any of those shows are still on the WWE roster: Shawn Michaels, Undertaker, and Triple-H. All of four wrestlers from the three WCW PPVs that summer are also on the WWE roster today: Booker T, Chris Benoit, Ric Flair, and Rey Mysterio Jr.

It's remarkable how much a talent roster can turn over in a decade, remarkable that someone like Mark Henry is one of the longest-tenured wrestlers on the WWE roster today. Longevity isn't to be taken for granted in this business.

I'm tempted to give what sounds like a wiseacre answer to the question of whether I believe Venis' skills are as sharp now as they were a decade ago, if WWE is wasting his skills. Really, though, it is difficult to say when all you can really tell in 2007 is that he takes a good beating when he's called upon to appear on Raw and get backstabbed by Carlito or spiked by Umaga. He and Viscera also are convincing as concerned onlookers when they appear in the background of a backstage skit on Raw.

More often than not, Venis' Monday night WWE obligations end long before the Raw pyrotechnics explode. If you're not one of the 14 or so people who logs on to wwe.com every week in hopes of seeing something truly special on *Heat*, you should know that Venis usually gets a match on that long-forgotten show each week. I hate to break it to you, but you've missed Val pinning Charlie Haas more than once in 2007. There's an upset for you.

It can be a great gig or a horrible one if you're Val Venis right now. Great if he's the kind of person who likes getting a regular paycheck that is probably still big enough to cover all his bills and leave a nice sum left over. Great if he likes doing his job with little or no pressure on him. But lousy if he spends a lot of his time reviewing tapes of the days when he was someone who really mattered in WWE—not a main-eventer, but someone whose appearances generated a big reaction and whose matches and feuds were watched intently.

It's not a particularly secure life to be living, what with releases being announced on wwe.com all the time. Sometimes I have to wonder if certain wrestlers on the WWE payroll only keep their jobs because the talent department hasn't yet realized they were still getting checks (see the recent release of Scotty 2 Hotty). I also wonder any time I see a developmental wrestler's release announced why that person got the ax and someone like Venis gets to continue on.

I hate to see any hard-working person in any profession lose his or her job, but when was the last time Venis made a dollar for WWE, and why couldn't any developmental wrestler take over his role at a much cheaper price?

If you would have asked me when I first saw Val Venis a decade or so if I thought he'd still be around in 2007, I probably would have told you no. Most one-dimensional gimmicks don't have that kind of shelf life, but whether anyone besides me, his family, and his closest friends notice, he is still around, is still humble enough to do his best, and, I assume, is still enjoying what he does, at least to some extent. For that, I think he deserves all of our respect.

I don't expect Venis to become a player again in WWE, but what do we ever really know about the future? Let's check back in 10 more years. ☐

the insider

By Brandi Mankiewicz

(The opinions expressed in "The Insider" are those of Brandi Mankiewicz alone and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of anyone else on the staff of this magazine.)

WRESTLING LOST ITS evil queen on June 15 when Sherri Martel closed her eyes for the last time. It was a tragic end to a storied career. For just this moment, I shall remove my own queenly tiara and place it to the side. Being the queen of all evil is nothing compared to the legacy of this great woman.

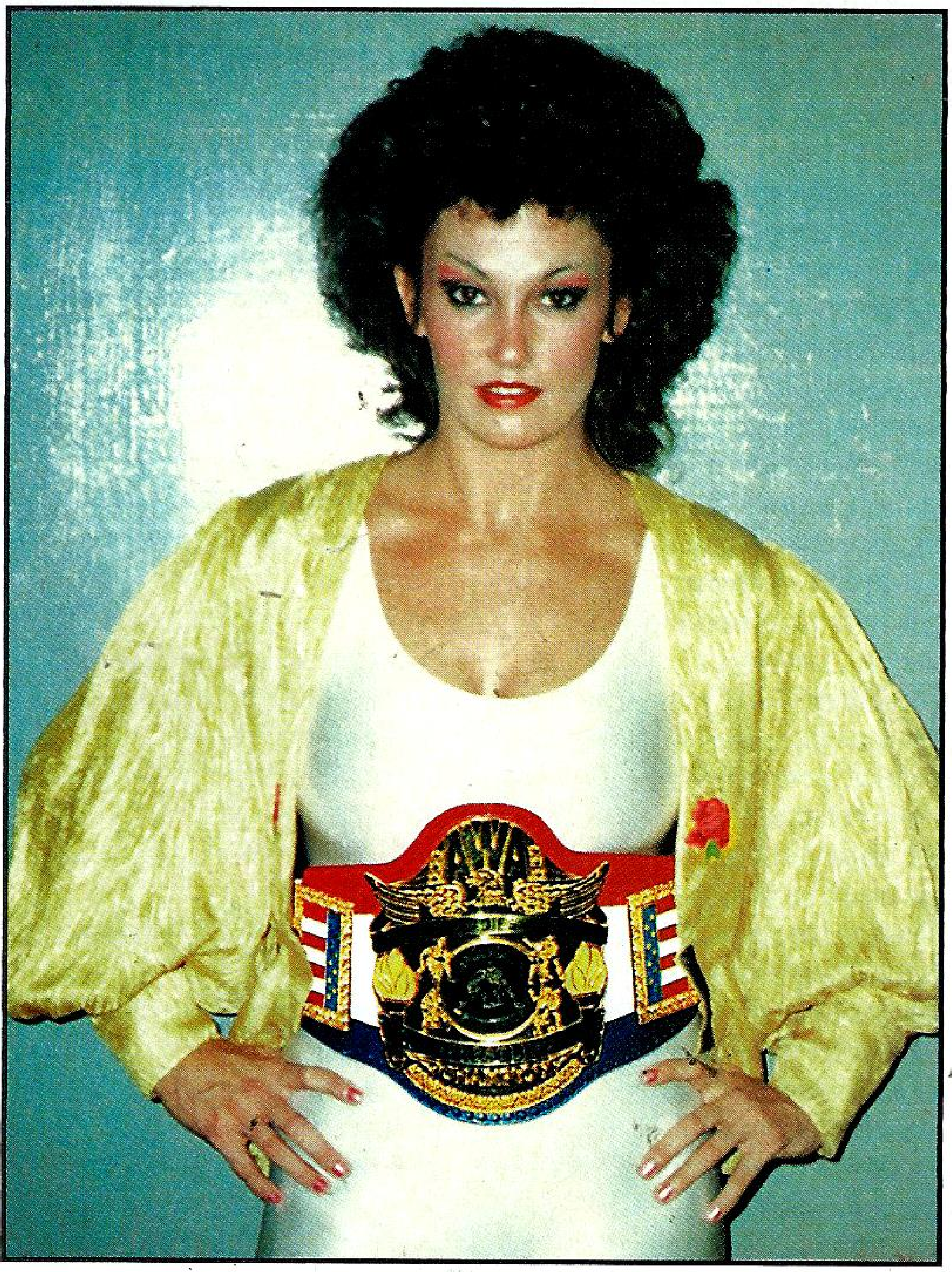
For those of you who only know of Sherri as a WWE Hall of Famer, you're missing so much. Sherri was a one of a kind performer who never once backed down from a fight—in the ring, in a bar, or in a locker room. She was a tough chick—and she'd take that as a compliment. Outside of the ring, Sherri was a wonderfully warm person who made you feel great from the moment she entered a room. In the ring, though, was a different story.

The first time I saw Sherri Martel was during one of her AWA women's title reigns. I can't really remember too much about the first time I ever saw her wrestle, but I can tell you this: It wasn't pretty for the opponent. Sherri pretty much handed the poor girl her ass in under three minutes. I was mesmerized within those 180 seconds to the point that I had my first conversation about wrestling with Matt Brock. I shyly asked my uncle for some information about Sherri and all I got was, "Kid, she's not like any other broad I've ever met."

From that moment on, I was a Sherri Martel fan. Hell, if she could make my uncle like her, she had to be someone worth knowing.

The amazing thing about Sherri is that she was the consummate heel. While I honor Gino Hernandez as the greatest heel that ever talked, Sherri was the greatest heel to ever don a dress. Sherri did everything with a certain panache that set her apart from the ordinary heels of the day. Everything was always tinged with a heelish flair that only someone of her stature could pull off. Her fierce in-ring style always had those little nuances that made the great heels stand out. If an opponent was in the corner, there were extra closed fists for her to eat. When the opponent fell onto the mat, she was greeted with an extra hard stomp to the back of her head. Of course, there were always the random eye rakes—just for fun. Sherri always seemed to enjoy inflicting pain.

Sherri parlayed her ferocious style into a career as a manager. Who better to lead the best heels of the day than their greatest female heel contemporary? Sure, Buddy Rose and Doug Somers weren't much to look at, but they were two of the toughest guys in the



Sherri Martel will likely be remembered for her elaborate makeup and constant interference as a manager, but long before any of that, Sensational Sherri was an AWA women's champion (pictured with her belt in 1986). She went on to defeat The Fabulous Moolah for the WWF women's championship in 1987.

While Elizabeth is often thought of as the pioneer of female managers, Sherri was far more interactive in her charges' matches. She never hesitated to mount the top rope in defense of one of her men. In this case, Sherri defends Booker T of Harlem Heat by attacking Brian Knobs.

AWA. They routinely devoured all competition.

Sherri's resume extended greatly once she moved on to the WWF. She pinned The Fabulous Moolah to the mat in 1987 to win the women's title, marking a changing of the guard since Moolah was Sherri's mentor and trainer. From that moment on, Sherri was the undisputed queen of women's wrestling in North America.

Sherri's time working for Vince McMahon saw her paired with some of the best bad guys around, from Randy Savage to Shawn Michaels. Although each of these guys needed no one to help them with their nefarious agendas, Sherri found a way to enhance their abilities and catapult them to greater heights than they could have achieved on their own.

As Sherri laced up her boots less frequently, she still maintained a presence at ringside. Many think of Elizabeth as the vanguard for female managers, but I always put Sherri lightyears ahead of Liz for one obvious reason: Sherri lived wrestling. When Liz would look confused at ringside, Sherri would be moving like a cat, keeping two steps ahead of the action in the ring. Sherri was always there to lend a claw, high-heeled shoe, or a brick-loaded purse to her man. That's what made her special. If need be, Sherri wasn't against climbing the ropes and unleashing a top rope maneuver of her own to even the score so her man could win. Stuff like that puts Sherri right up there with managers like Capt. Lou Albano, J.J. Dillon, Percy Pringle, and "Luscious" Johnny Valiant. When managers are willing to put their bodies on the line for the good of their charge, well, that takes cahones. Sherri had the biggest set of them all.

When Sherri moved on to WCW, she became the manager of Harlem Heat and lifelong friends with her "brothers," Booker T and Stevie Ray. That wrestling family was forged on the road, but still remains intact today ... or remained intact until this tragedy. I truly feel for Booker and Stevie.

While I'll never forget Sherri's triumphant beatdown of Candi Devine for the AWA title or playing tonsil hockey with Col. Parker, I guess I'll never forget her spirit most of all. She taught this young deviant that it was okay to play outside the rules even while wearing a beaded ball gown—and how to look damn hot doing it.

I will now place my queenly tiara on my head once again in honor of the greatest queen to ever reign. May she finally find some peace. ☐

capsule profile

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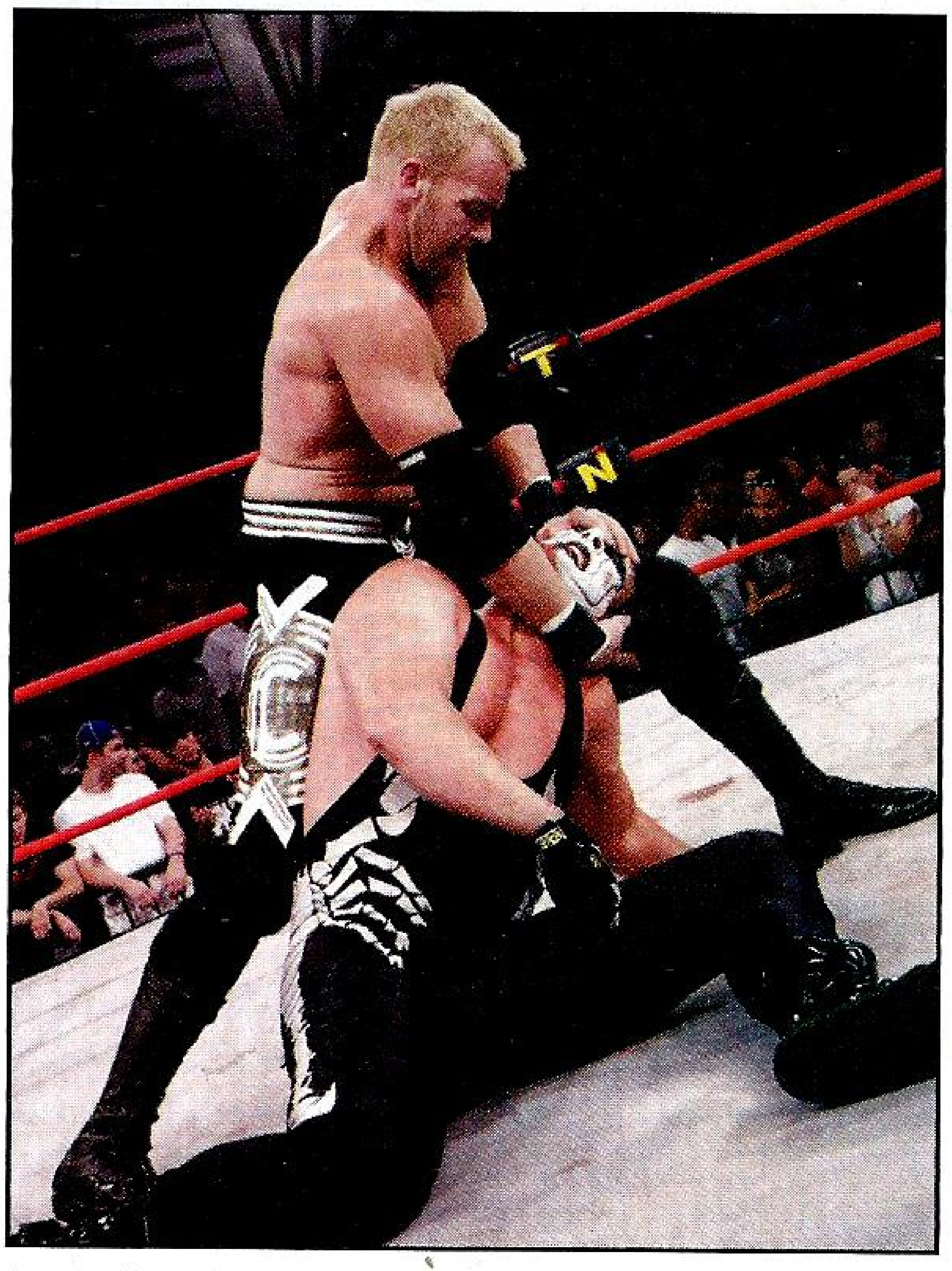
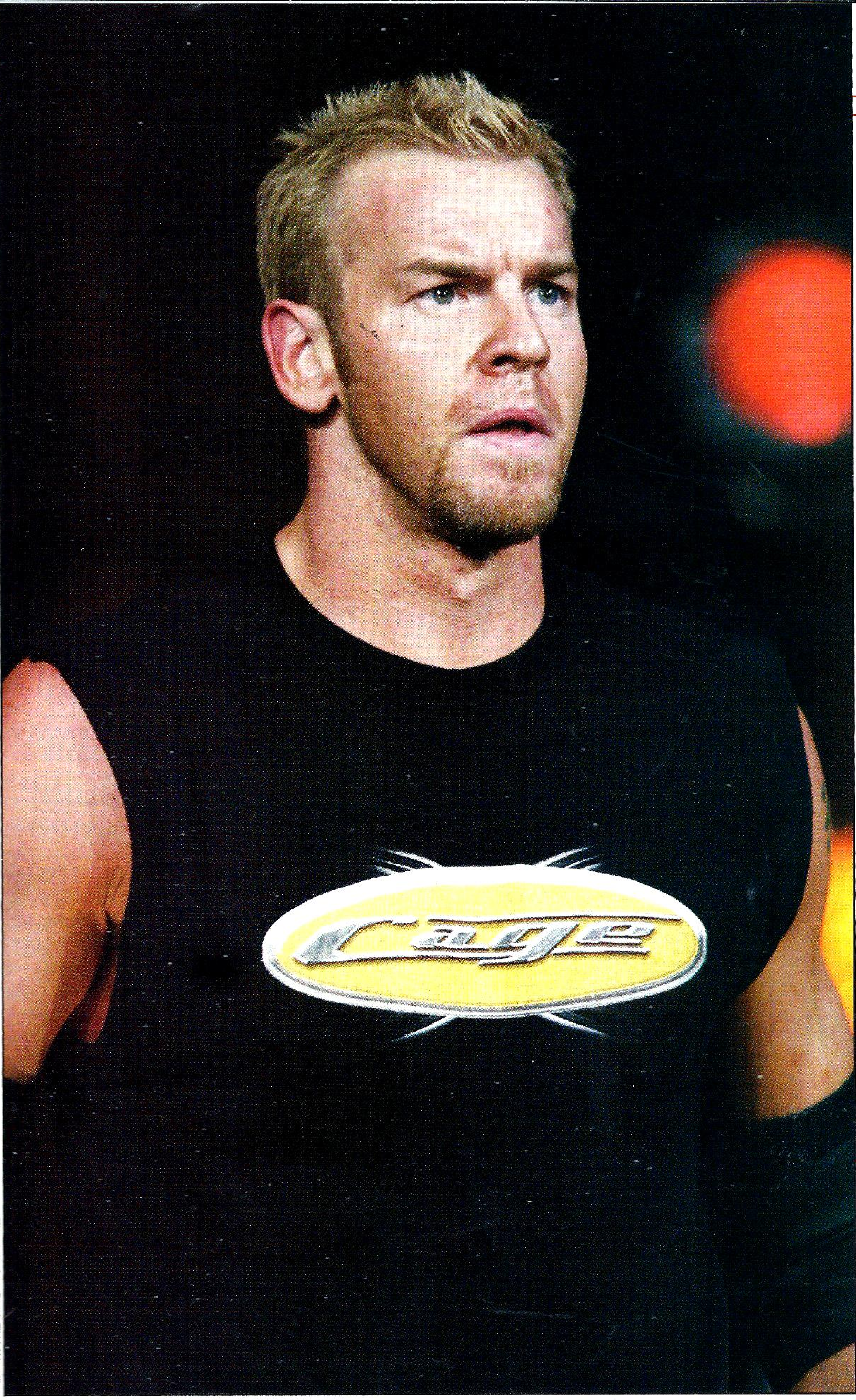
CHRISTIAN CAGE

HE HAS BECOME a two-time NWA champion, but for Christian Cage it was a rather long road to get there ... Began his career in the mid-1990s on the independent circuit with the future Edge and Rhino as a member of the Thug Life stable ... Won the ECWA heavyweight championship ... Joined the WWF in the late-1990s as a member of the blood-drinking vampire group The Brood, along with Edge and Gangrel ... Dropped "Cage" from his name, and became known simply as "Christian" ... Won WWF light heavyweight championship from Taka Michinoku in his first WWF match ... Split from Gangrel to form a tag team with Edge ... With Edge, would go on to win an impressive seven WWF World tag team titles ... Occasionally wrestled with Edge as the masked tag team "Los Conquistadors" ... He and Edge set the benchmark for tables, ladders, and chairs matches against The Hardy Boyz and The Dudley Boyz ... Grew jealous of Edge after he won the King of the Ring tournament ... Split up the tag team, envious of Edge's Intercontinental title win ... Won the Intercontinental championship from Edge at Unforgiven 2001 ... Joined the WCW/ECW Alliance ... Lost the Intercontinental title to Edge, but won the European championship ... Lost the European belt to "Diamond" Dallas Page ... Joined with Lance Storm and Test to form The Un-Americans ... Won the WWF World tag team title with Storm ... They lost the championship to Kane and The Hurricane, which led to The Un-Americans' breakup ... Teamed with Chris Jericho in late-2002 to win another WWF World tag team title ... Feuded with Bill Goldberg, leading to a steel cage match between the two ... Called himself the "New People's Champion" during his rivalry with The Rock ... Referred to his fans as his "peeps" ... Won his second Intercontinental championship in a nine-man battle royal ... Traded the I-C title back and forth with Booker T in 2003 ... Lost the belt to Rob Van Dam in a ladder match ... Had storyline relationship with Lita ... Later teamed with Trish Stratus to feud with Chris Jericho and Lita ... Hired Tyson Tomko as a bodyguard ... Joined anti-ECW crusaders for the first ECW One Night Stand pay-per-view ... Hosted a popular talk show segment on WWE programming called "The Peep Show" ... Drafted to Smackdown in the summer of 2005 ... Fought The Mexicools after they destroyed "The Peep Show" set ... Nicknamed himself "Captain Charisma" ... Feuded with Booker T again ... Declined to renew his WWE contract in October 2005 ... Lost his final WWE match on Smackdown in November 2005 ... Joined TNA nine days later, declaring his goal to win the NWA heavyweight championship ... Used the name Christian Cage in TNA ... Turned down an offer to join Team Canada ... Kicked off 2006 by chasing Jeff Jarrett and the NWA title ... Defeated Jeff Jarrett for the NWA championship at February's Against All Odds ... Defended the championship in NWA promotions such as 1 Pro Wrestling, Liberty States Wrestling, and Northeast Wrestling ... Feuded with Abyss ... Appeared in Ring of Honor for one night only ... Lost the NWA championship in a controversial "King Of The Mountain" match after holding it for four months ... Wrestled on the independent circuit while trying to regain the belt in TNA ... Reunited with Tomko ... Formed the "Christian Coalition" with Tomko, Scott Steiner, and A.J. Styles ... Defeated Sting and defending champ Abyss to win the NWA World championship in a three-way dance at January 2007's Final Resolution ... Defeated Samoa Joe and Kurt Angle to retain the title ... Lost the championship in controversial fashion at TNA's Sacrifice ... Had not been pinned or made to submit in TNA for over 18 months, but lost his championships in multi-person matches ... What does the future hold for "Captain Charisma"? His peeps are excited to find out! ☐



In an effort to reveal the secret behind Abyss' dark past, Christian Cage began a feud with not only the "Man Monster," but also with Sting. Perhaps Cage should stay out of Abyss' business.



Photos by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

CHRISTIAN CAGE

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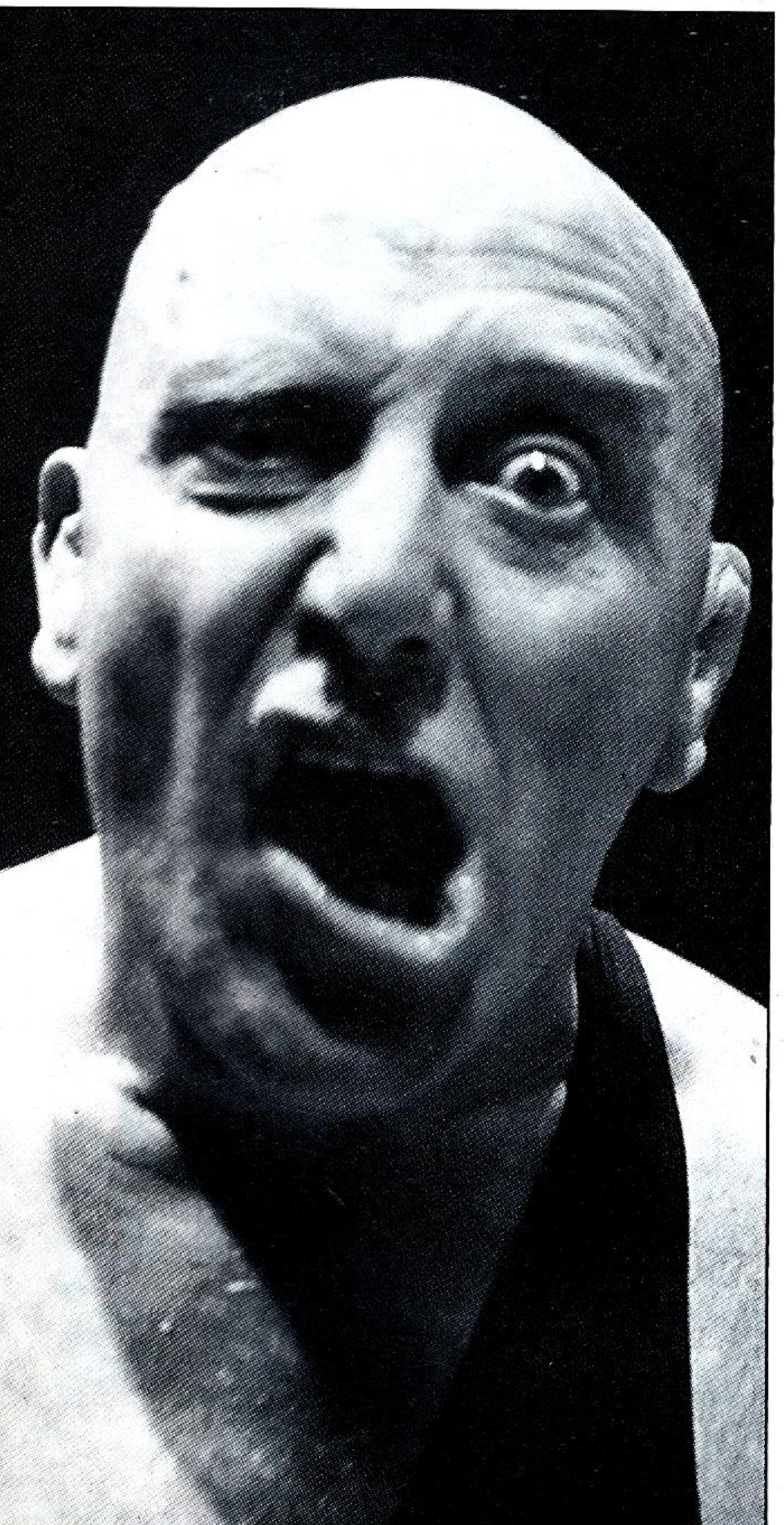
By Scott Teal

HANS MORTIER



Jacob Grobbe has lived a life that is fit for a movie. The same man, who, as a teenager, fled the Germans and escaped to America, later portrayed a villainous German inside the ring. Perhaps his real-life brush with the Nazi army made him an even more effective wrestling heel.

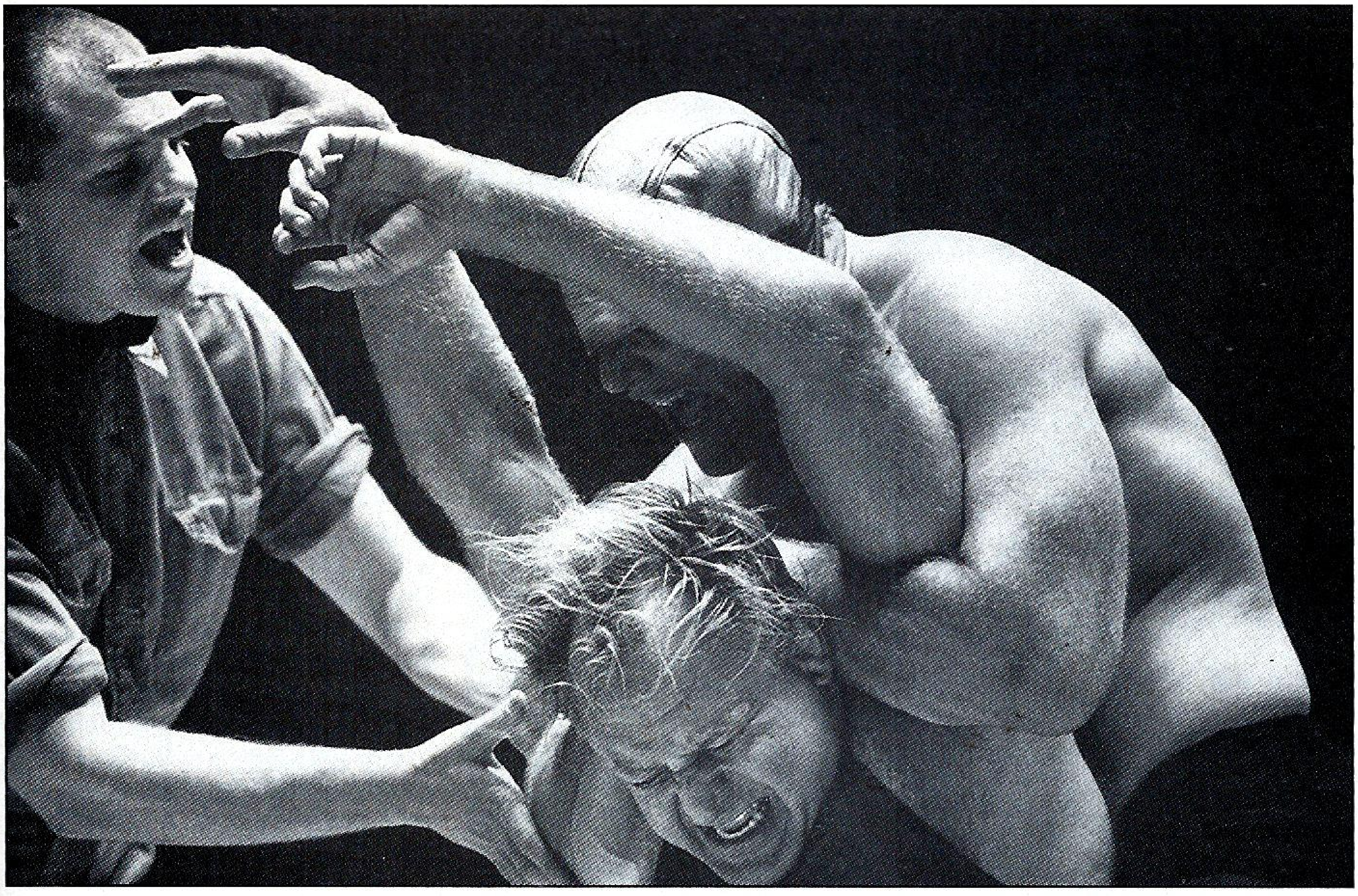
He attended Hogere Burger School, a college preparatory school in Leiden, Holland. "We were taught three different languages besides our own—French, German, and English," said Grobbe. "When I was wrestling, I did what the occasion demanded. Most of the time I spoke terrible English with a strong German accent. I probably sounded a lot like Sgt. Schultz of *Hogan's Heroes*. When I was matched against Bruno [Sammartino], I cursed him out in Italian. That brought the people into Madison Square Garden."

In 1943, when his country was occupied by the Germans, the 19-year-old left his home. "They wanted us to sign a paper saying we wouldn't undertake any action against the occupying powers. I didn't trust them, so I took off for France. I didn't have any money, so I hitchhiked to Paris. The Germans, however, occupied France as well, so I took a train to Tunisia, North Africa."

Grobbe took a job working on a dam in a small village and managed to avoid a terrible fate on February 12, 1944. "The Germans raided that little village, killed 14 people, and took most of the men older than 17 to a concentration camp. At the time, I was in our barracks with a group of Arabs. The Germans, being racist, didn't like Arabs, so they didn't bother to search their barracks. If they had found me, they would have shot us all."

After returning to Paris, Grobbe lived in a sixth-floor hospital room until the city was liberated. He took a job with an American utility outfit, talked his way onto an airplane bound for the U.S., and eventually landed in Washington, D.C. "I managed to sneak through customs and bought a train ticket to Raleigh, North Carolina. From there, I went to Miami, then wound up working in a logging camp in Tacoma, Washington." There, a local policeman introduced Grobbe to professional wrestling. He wrestled his first match against Al Baffert.

After being told that Tony Stecher, a promoter in Minneapolis, might be able to use him, Grobbe took a train to the Twin Cities. "I just brazenly walked into the office and said, 'I want to wrestle.' I learned the business the hard way when they threw me in against a tough guy



The Great Mortier applies his notorious full-nelson to The Great Scott on May 17, 1963, in one of the many victories he accumulated before earning a match against WWWF champion Bruno Sammartino. Sammartino broke Mortier's full-nelson, thus ending his undefeated streak in the WWWF.

named Joe Pazandak."

Grobbe's education continued for the next several years, as he wrestled under a number of different names. He wrestled as Dutch Howlett for much of the next four years and appeared as Tarzan Howlett in Chicago in 1950. Grobbe then journeyed overseas to wrestle in Europe, South Africa, and France. In 1953, he began wearing a mask and wrestled under various aliases: Great Zorra (St. Louis, 1953), Tarzan Zorra (Buffalo and Toronto, 1951), Great Zorro (New Zealand, 1955–1956), The Masked Man (Austria, 1961), Les Masque Noir (France, 1961), and Dutch Zorra (England, 1962). In late-1962, he began wrestling in Florida as Mighty Zorro. When Eddie Graham unmasked him on March 28, 1963, in Jacksonville, his identity was announced as The Great Mortier.

On the following night, he began a campaign in the WWWF by beating "Sailor" Art Thomas in New Haven, Connecticut. Using his devastating full-nelson hold, he left a trail of defeated opponents behind him, including The Great Scott, Ted Lewin, Magnificent Maurice, and Bob Boyer, before getting a match in Madison Square Garden against WWWF heavyweight champion Bruno Sammartino. Until that time, Mortier's full-nelson was inescapable, but Bruno became the first person to break out of the hold and defeat Mortier.

After two unsuccessful attempts to wrest the crown from Sammartino in the Garden, Mortier spent most of the next four years in Japan, Hawaii, and California. He returned to make one more attempt to win the WWWF belt in 1967, but failed again. Following a move to The Sunshine State, Mortier won the Florida State title from The Gladiator (Ricky Hunter) on February 4, 1969. That November, Mortier joined Boris Malenko and headed for Texas, where he billed himself as Lord Charles Montague. The pair held the American tag team title for several months.

Grobbe went on to wrestle as Dr. X in the Carolinas and Japan during 1971. He closed out his career in Toronto, Ontario, in 1974 and moved back to Holland. He and his wife, Yolaine, spent three years in Cannes, France, then moved back to Holland, where they've remained ever since.

Having saved their money and made good investments, Jacob and Yolaine have enjoyed their retirement. They spend their idle time bicycling, going to the theater, playing chess, gardening, and spending time with their many friends. Grobbe stays in touch with a few of his old wrestling friends, but makes it a point to talk to his closest friends, Don and Dotty Curtis, every Sunday afternoon. The couple currently spends as much time as possible with their great-grandson, a one-year-old named Finn.

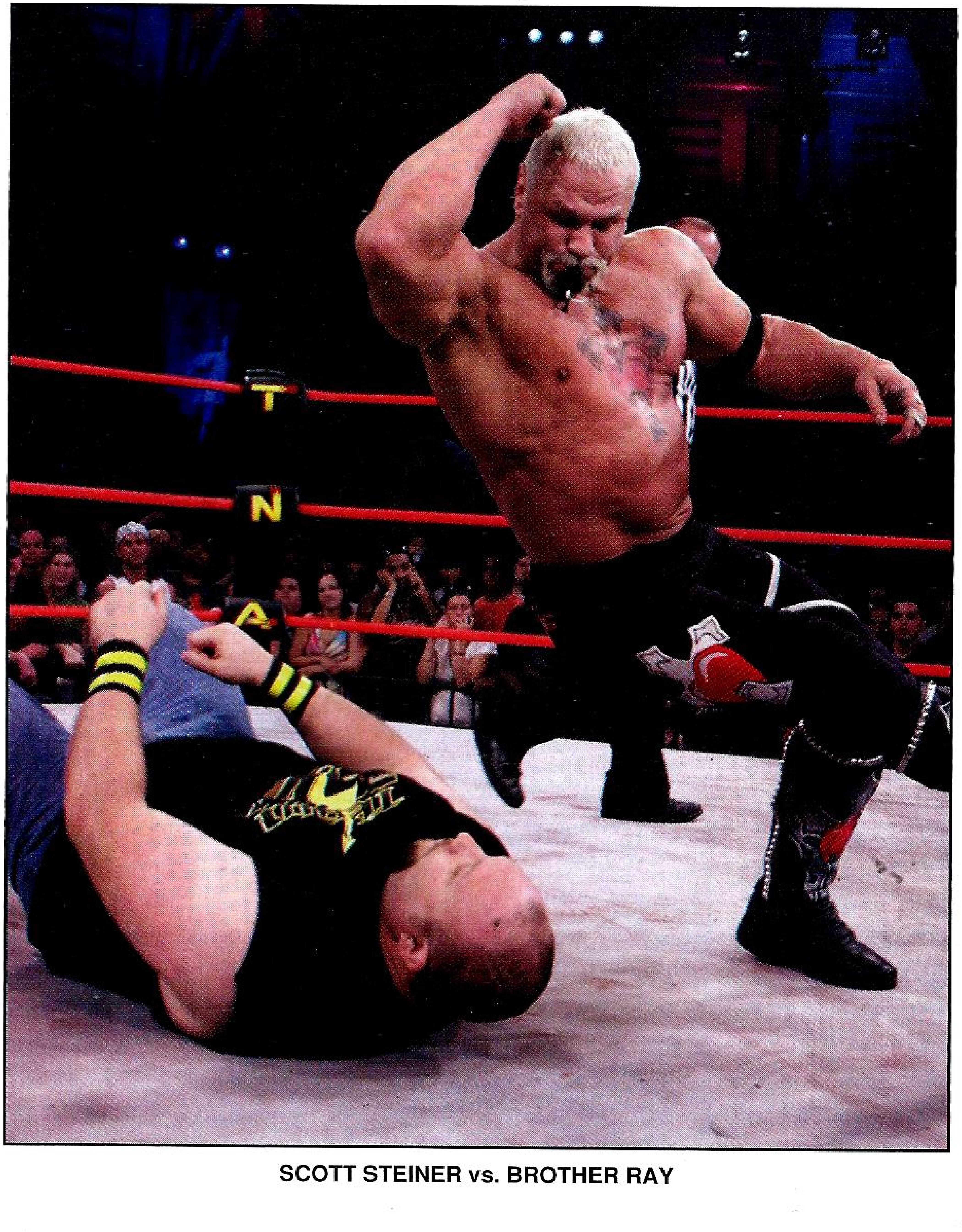
(Scott Teal publishes the newsletter "Whatever Happened To … ?" He can be reached at P.O. Box 2781, Hendersonville, TN 37077-2781 or at www.1wrestlinglegends.com.) ☐

plain speaking

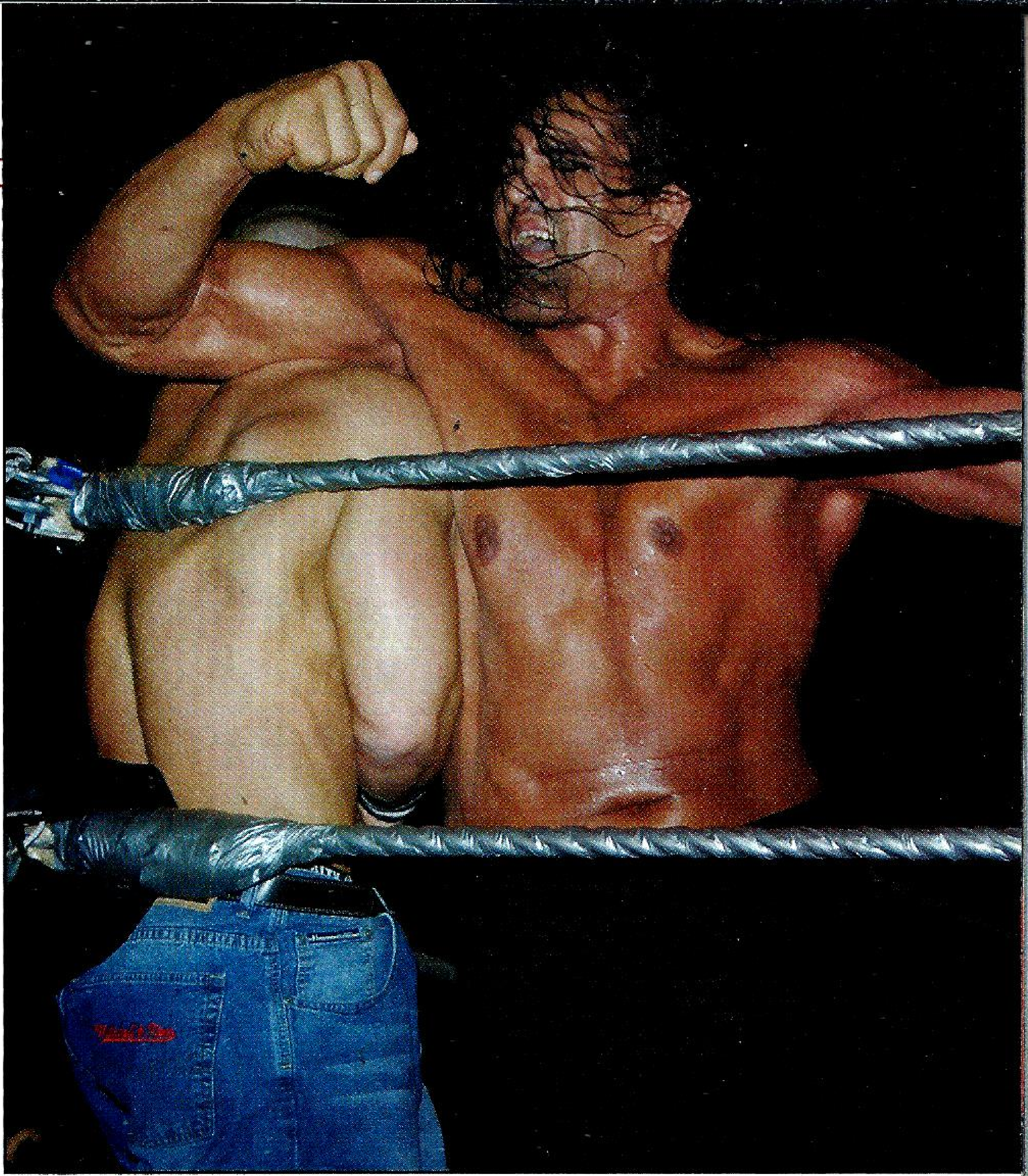
With Matt Brock

Harder than nails, veteran wrestling reporter Matt Brock has logged more miles covering wrestling than any other journalist. Every month Matt will travel to the sport's hotbeds, reporting everything he sees without fear or favor

ORLANDO, FL: It's not too often that I find myself agreeing with Scott Steiner, but tonight "Big Poppa Pump" spoke the truth, even if it was a bitter pill for Team 3D to swallow. For the past few months, Brother Ray has been prattling on about Team 3D's legacy and how winning the NWA World tag title would be another milestone in the team's tremendous career. ¶Steiner threw a bucket of cold water over Team 3D's celebration when Scott and his older brother, Rick, interrupted. Scott ran down the former Dudley Boyz, saying that while he and Rick were traveling the world and beating some of the top tag teams in the business, Ray and Devon were stuck in a bingo hall in Philadelphia. Rick then unfurled a scroll that had to be nearly as long as New Jack's rap sheet and began rattling off a partial list of some of the great teams the Steiners beat: The Road Warriors, The Four Horsemen, The Midnight Express, and on and on. ¶For all of Team 3D's accomplishments—impressive as they are—they haven't been the dominant force that the Steiners once were. They've won plenty of titles, but lost them to mediocre teams. Team 3D is very good, but they never built the aura of being truly great. ¶If legacy is what drives them, they're going to have to prove they can beat the Steiners, and even if they can, they will not have done so when the Steiners were at their best.


SCOTT STEINER vs. BROTHER RAY

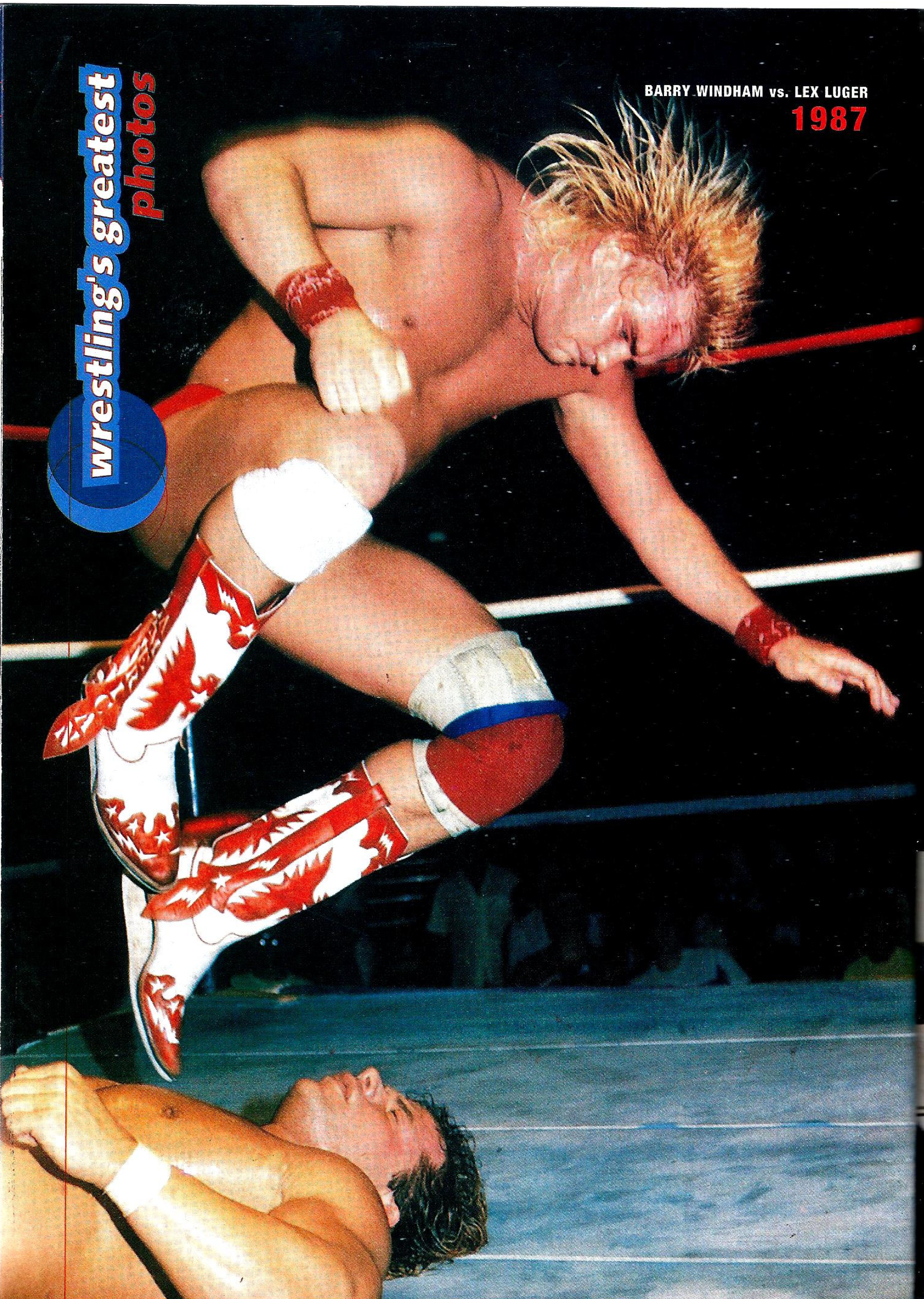
MISSISSAUGA, ON: "Matt, you're headed up to Toronto for the *Saturday Night's Main Event* taping, right?" Dan Murphy called just as I was settling into the couch, Scotch in hand, ready to watch the TV. I told Murph I was indeed heading to the home of the Blue Jays and went to hang up the phone. "You're going to want to come up a few days early," I heard Murphy say as I moved the receiver closer to the cradle and tried to concentrate on Derek Jeter at bat. "UWA Hardcore is bringing in Jushin Liger and Ultimo Dragon for two nights." ¶Murphy had my attention. Liger doesn't make too many trips to this side of the ocean, and Dragon is usually too busy with his Toryumon school and promotion in Mexico to make many U.S. (or Canadian) indy dates. ¶I showed up for the second of the back-to-back nights they were to appear. Next door to the venue, a Lithuanian festival was going on, complete with girls wearing costumes that, by comparison, made Liger's gear look ordinary. While Murphy scampered around filling his ever-present spiral notebook with interviews, I mingled with some fans. The fans couldn't say enough nice things about the UWA and its promoters, John and Joe McCausland. Honest, hard-working, genuine—these are adjectives you rarely hear used regarding wrestling promoters, but these brothers have a strong fan base. After Ultimo and Liger defeated Alex Shelley and Chris Sabin, Ultimo took time to thank the McCauslands during the standing ovation from the capacity crowd and declared "UWA is the number-one promotion in Canada." Based on what I've seen, he may be right.



JOHN CENA vs. THE GREAT KHALI

TORONTO, ON: Toronto is just about a 15-minute drive away from Mississauga, but the difference between watching Ultimo and Liger one night and John Cena vs. The Great Khali the next night somehow has me feeling jetlagged. Cena continues to get the most mixed crowd reactions I've ever heard for a guy who generally plays by the rules, defends his title against all comers, and genuinely seems to care about how the fans feel about him. ¶Maybe Cena had built up some false confidence from his controversial victory over Khali at Judgment Day, because Khali completely dominated the Raw World champion tonight, pinning Cena after a chokeslam. Cena is so intent on trying to win over his critics that he's playing into the hands of a genetic monster like Khali. If Cena used a stick-and-move strategy or targeted Khali's knees to ground the big man, he stands a good chance of beating him. Instead, Cena seems intent to go toe-to-toe with Khali, as if the only way he can win respect is to somehow survive the most hellacious beating he can and somehow hoist the giant up for his FU. ¶If you ask me, if Khali beats Cena for the title, those fans who boo Cena will only have themselves to blame.

LONDON, ON: Cena's not the only guy who seems to be making some poor decisions these days. C.M. was one of the fastest-rising stars in any WWE brand until he veered off the track, joining Elijah Burke and the New Breed and seemingly turning his back on his fans. As it turned out, Punk was just playing the New Breed, and just a few weeks later he was on his own again. Maybe it's just me, but it seems like some of the fans haven't quite embraced Punk after his dalliance with Burke's crew. Maybe it's because he looked so natural as a rulebreaker. ¶So, instead of chasing the ECW title, Punk is feuding with Burke and the New Breed, which can only sidetrack his career. Tonight, Burke beat Punk in a no-DQ match because Marcus Cor Von interfered on Burke's behalf. Meanwhile, Punk has no allies because no one is really sure if they can trust him. I have no doubt that Burke and Punk are the young lions of ECW, and one of them will probably wear the title in the near future. As of right now, I give the edge to Burke. Punk still has some growing up to do. ☐

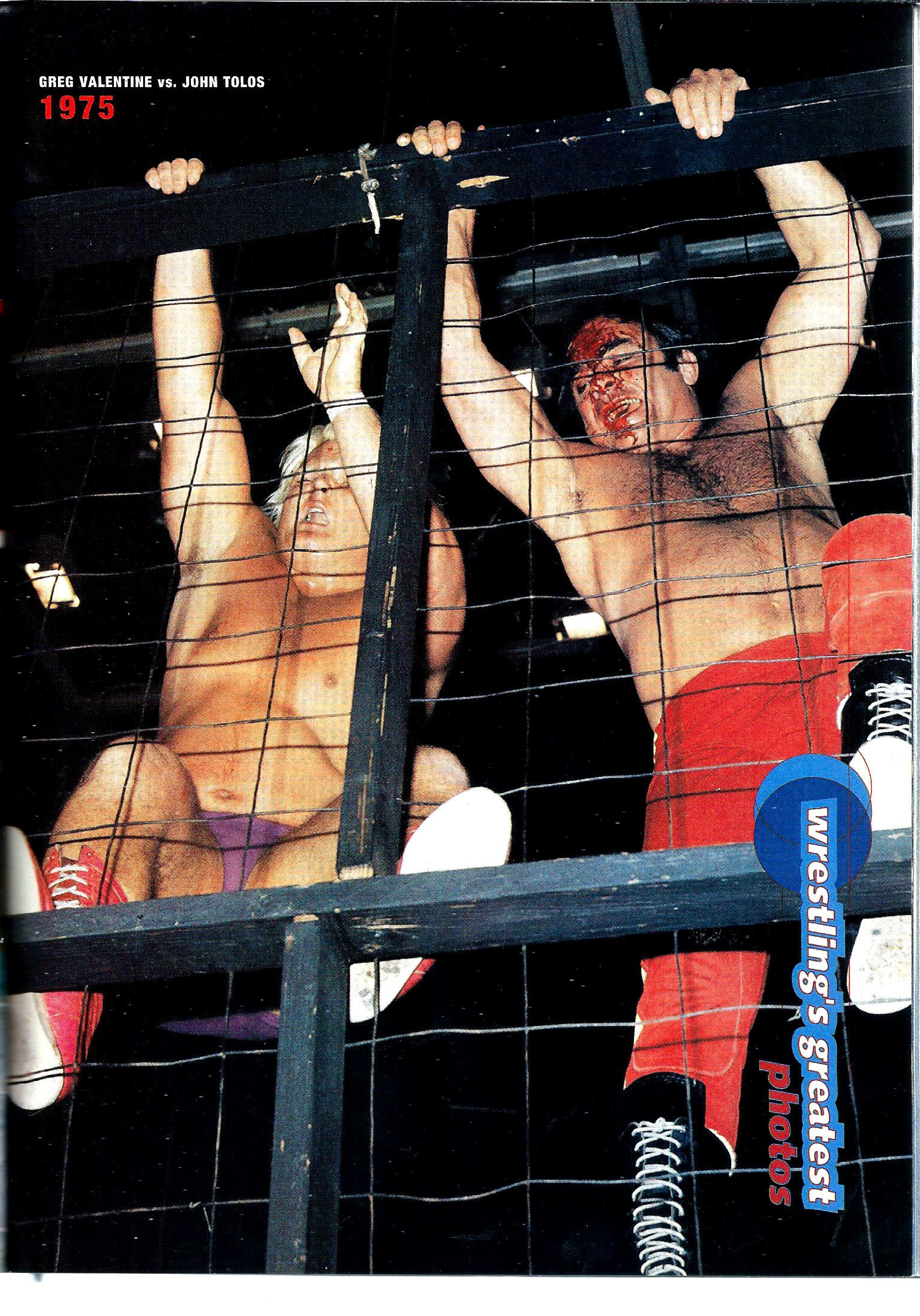


BARRY WINDHAM vs. LEX LUGER

1987

GREG VALENTINE vs. JOHN TOLOS

1975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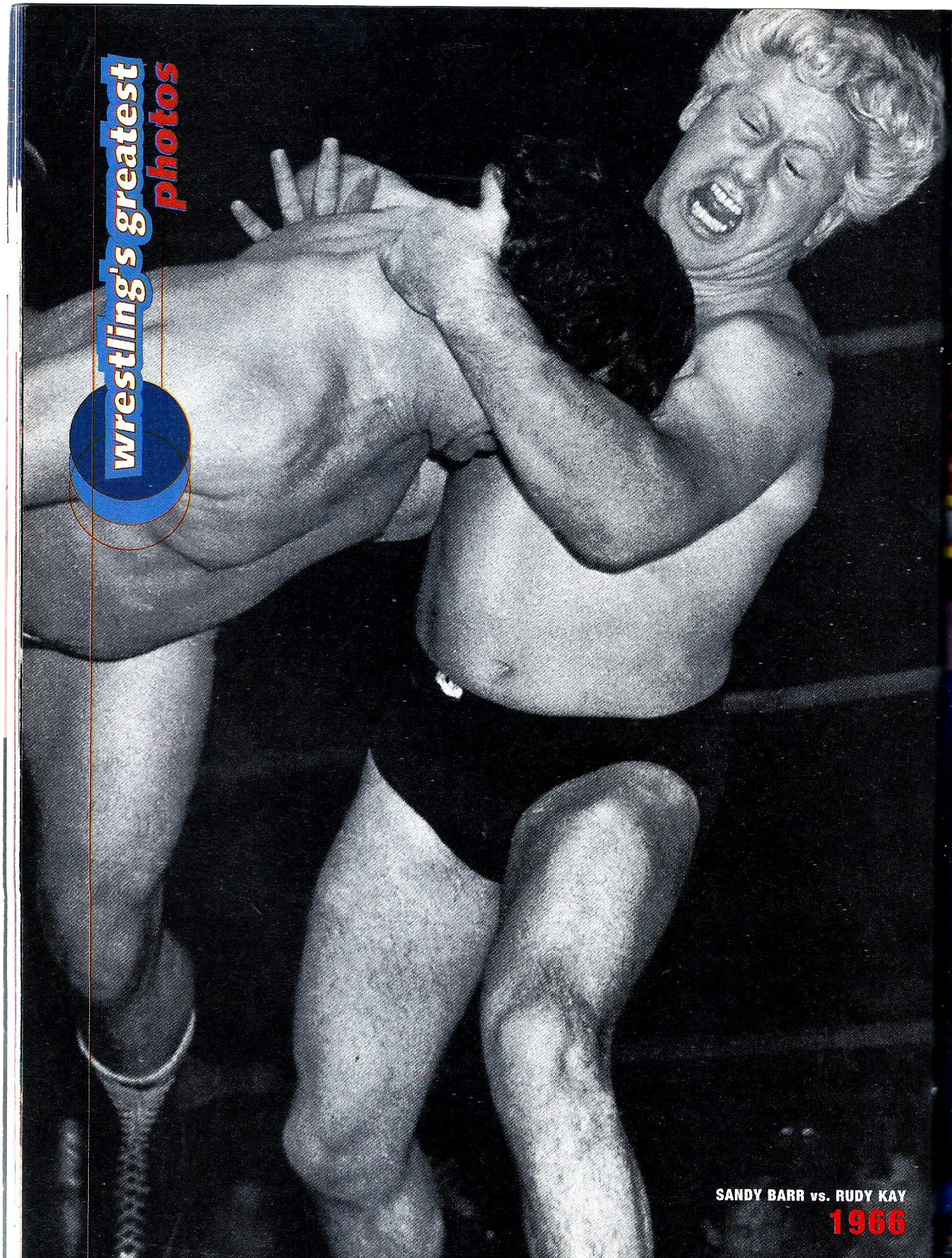
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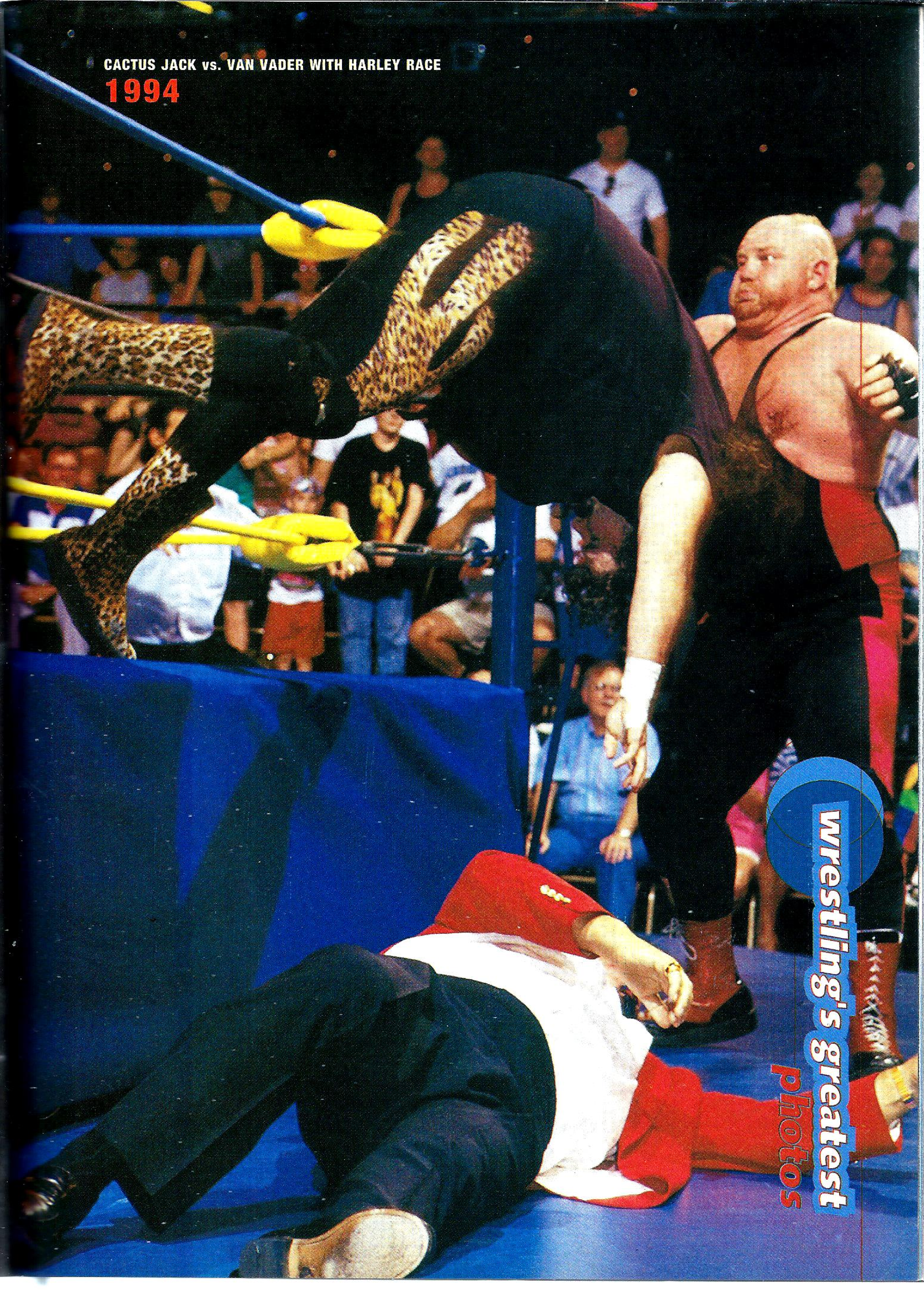
SANDY BARR vs. RUDY KAY

1966

CACTUS JACK vs. VAN VADER WITH HARLEY RACE

1994



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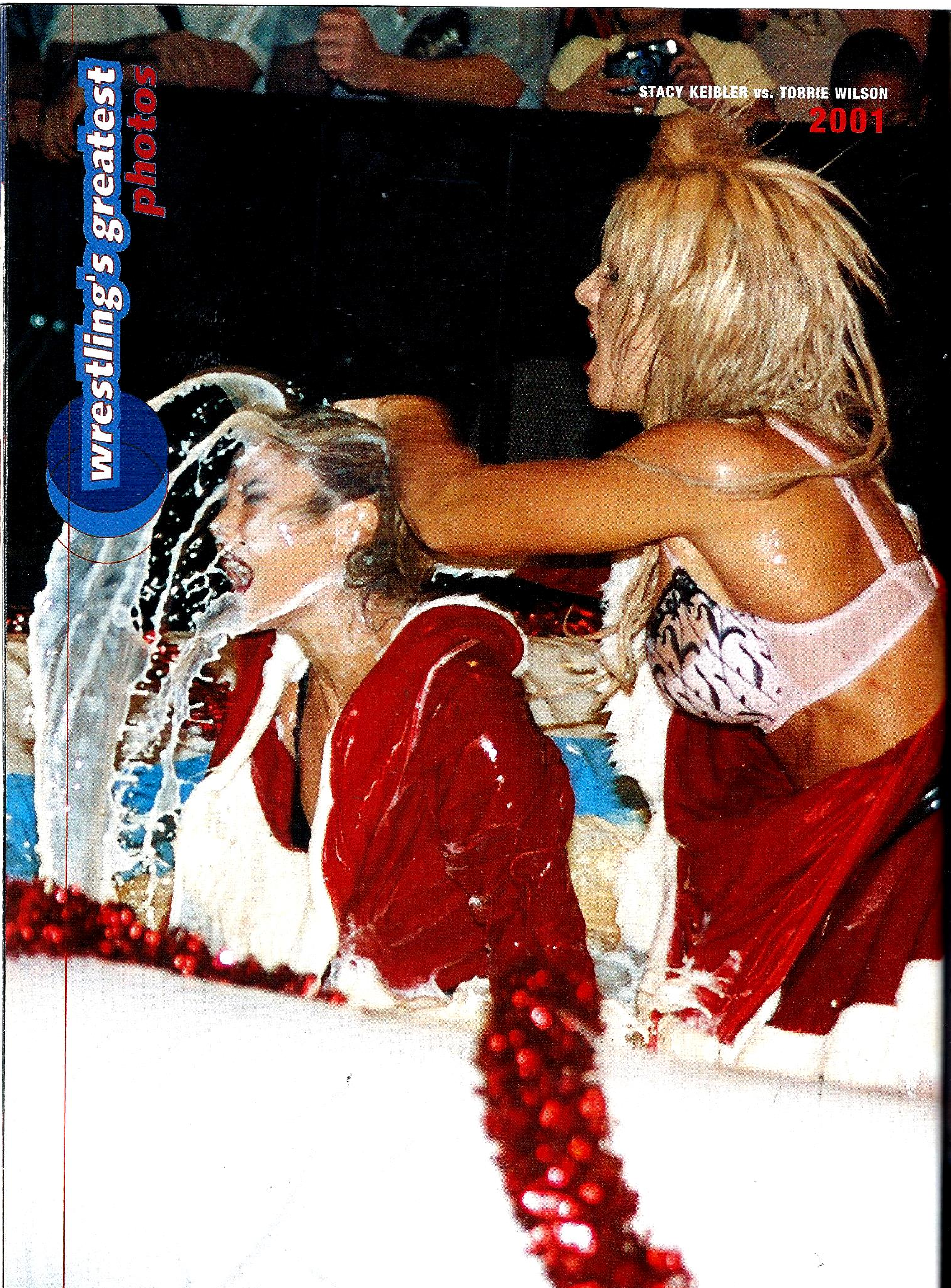
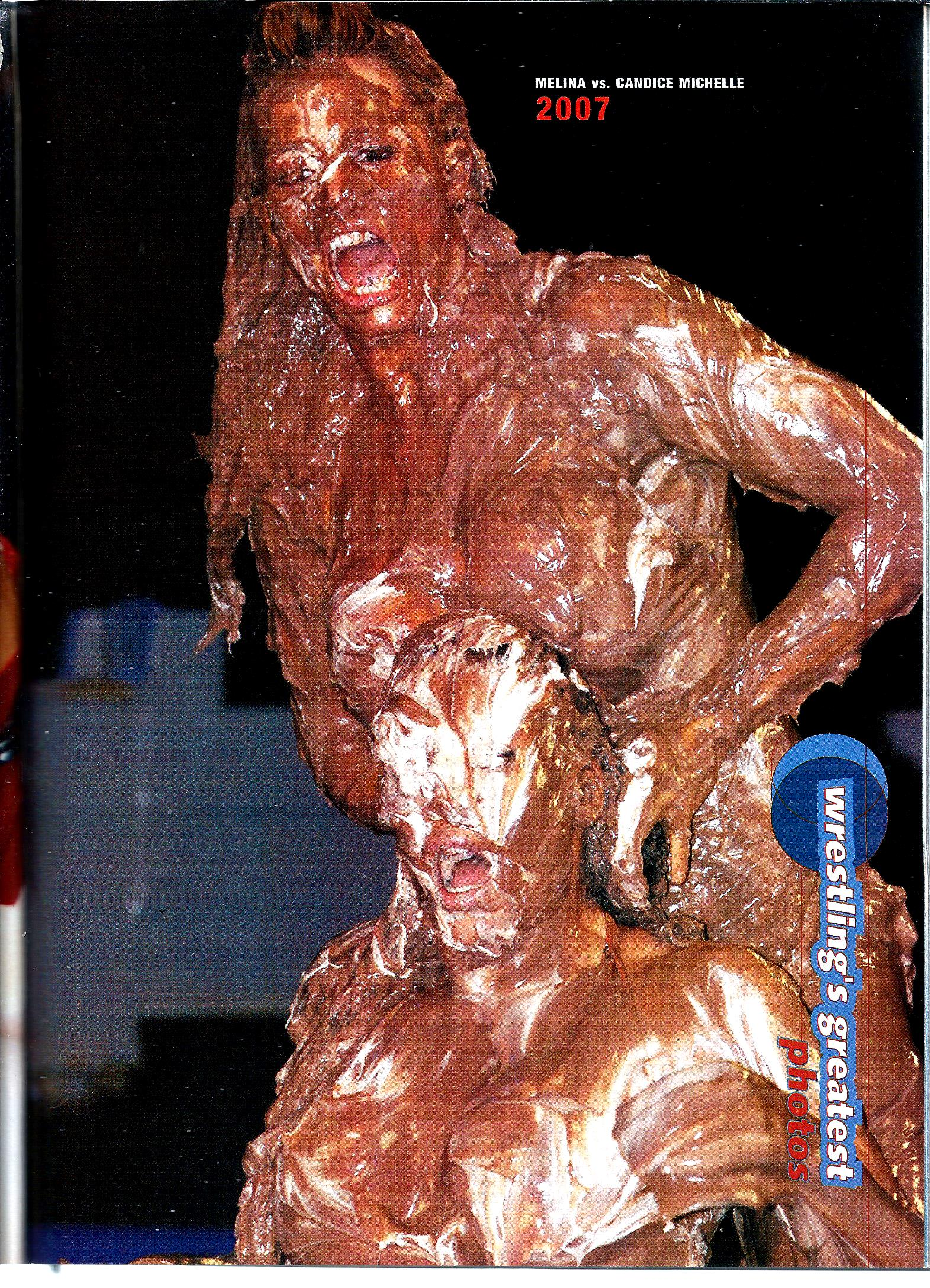


STACY KEIBLER vs. TORRIE WILSON

2001



MELINA vs. CANDICE MICHELLE

2007

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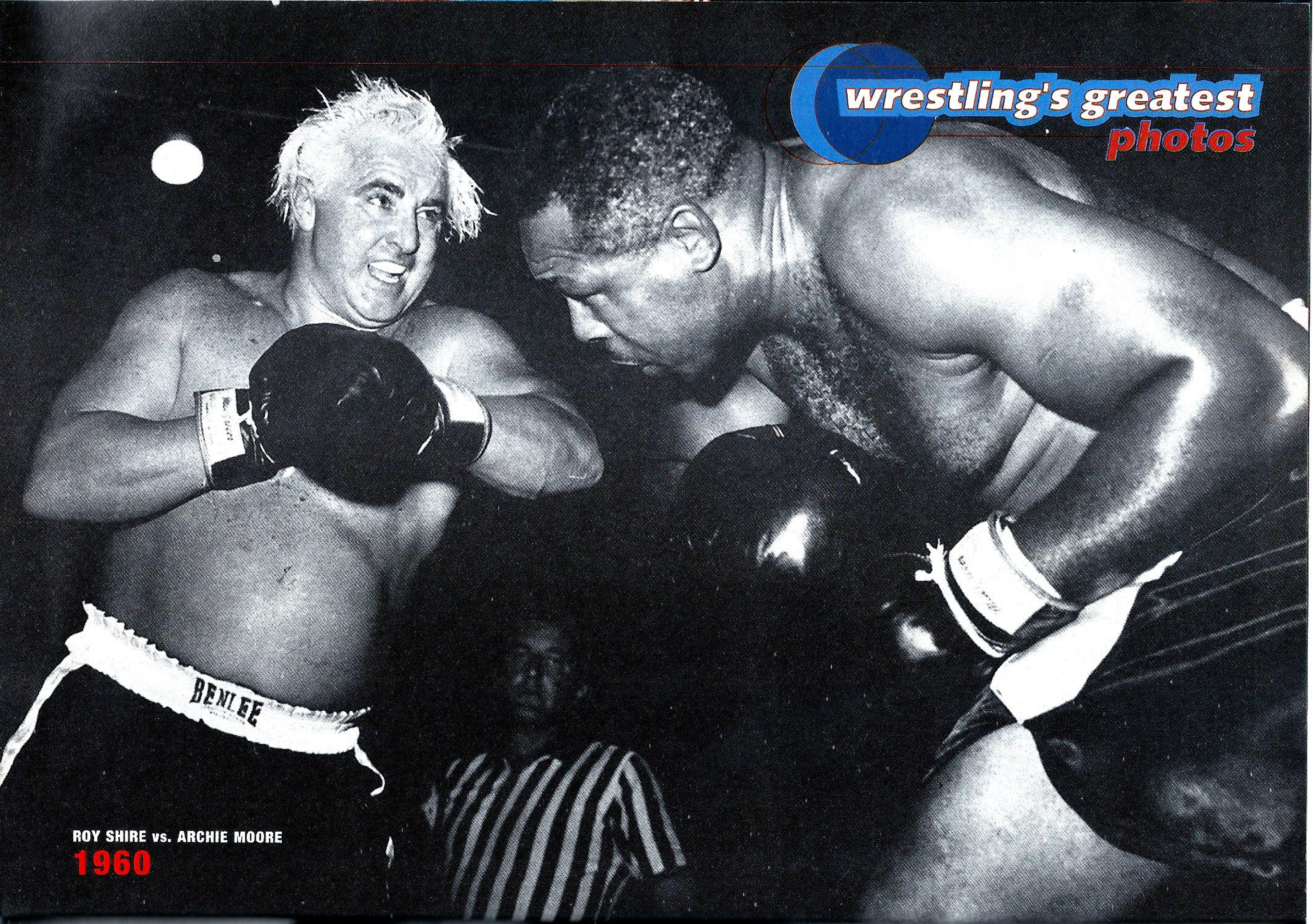
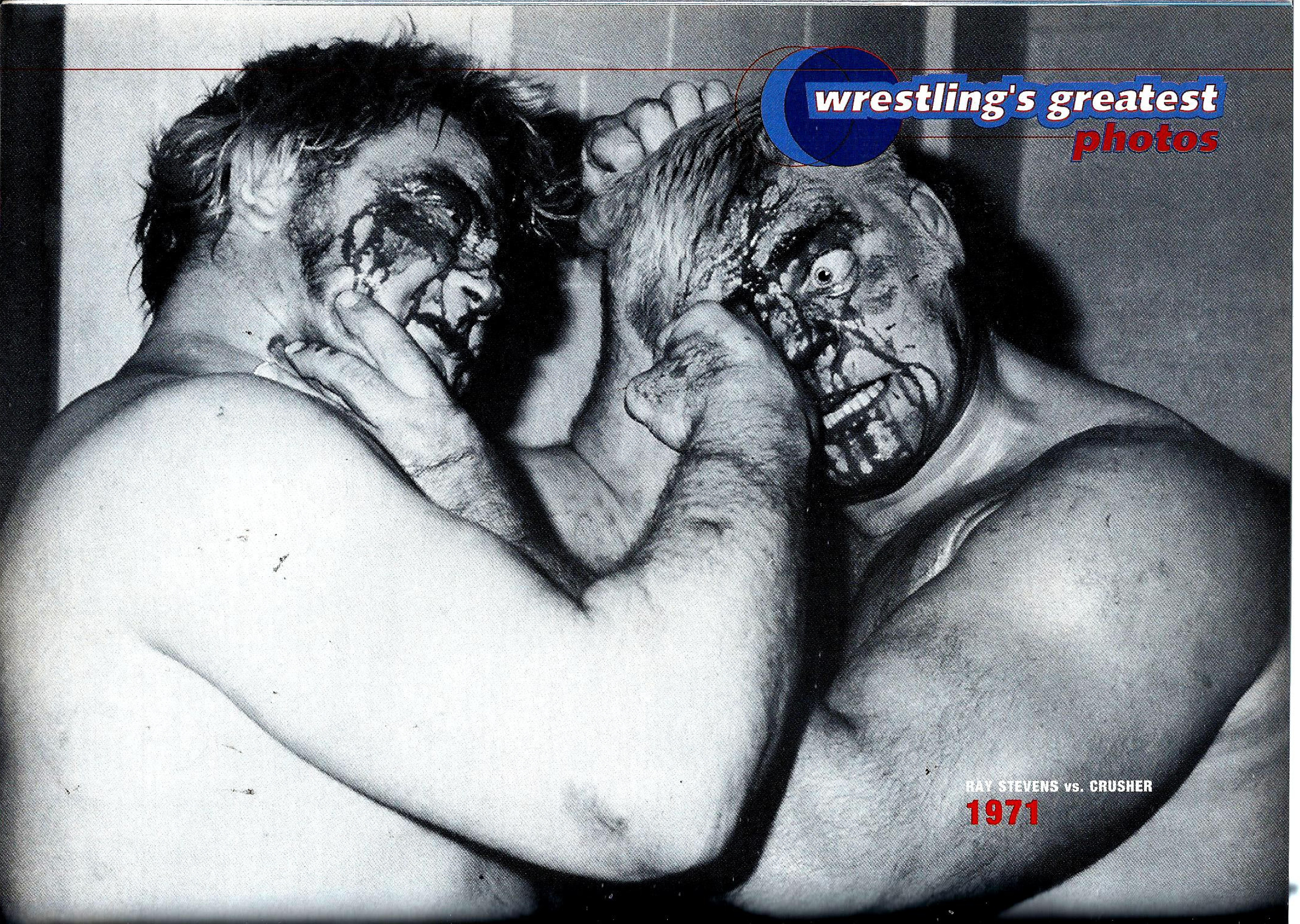


ROY SHIRE vs. ARCHIE MOORE

1960

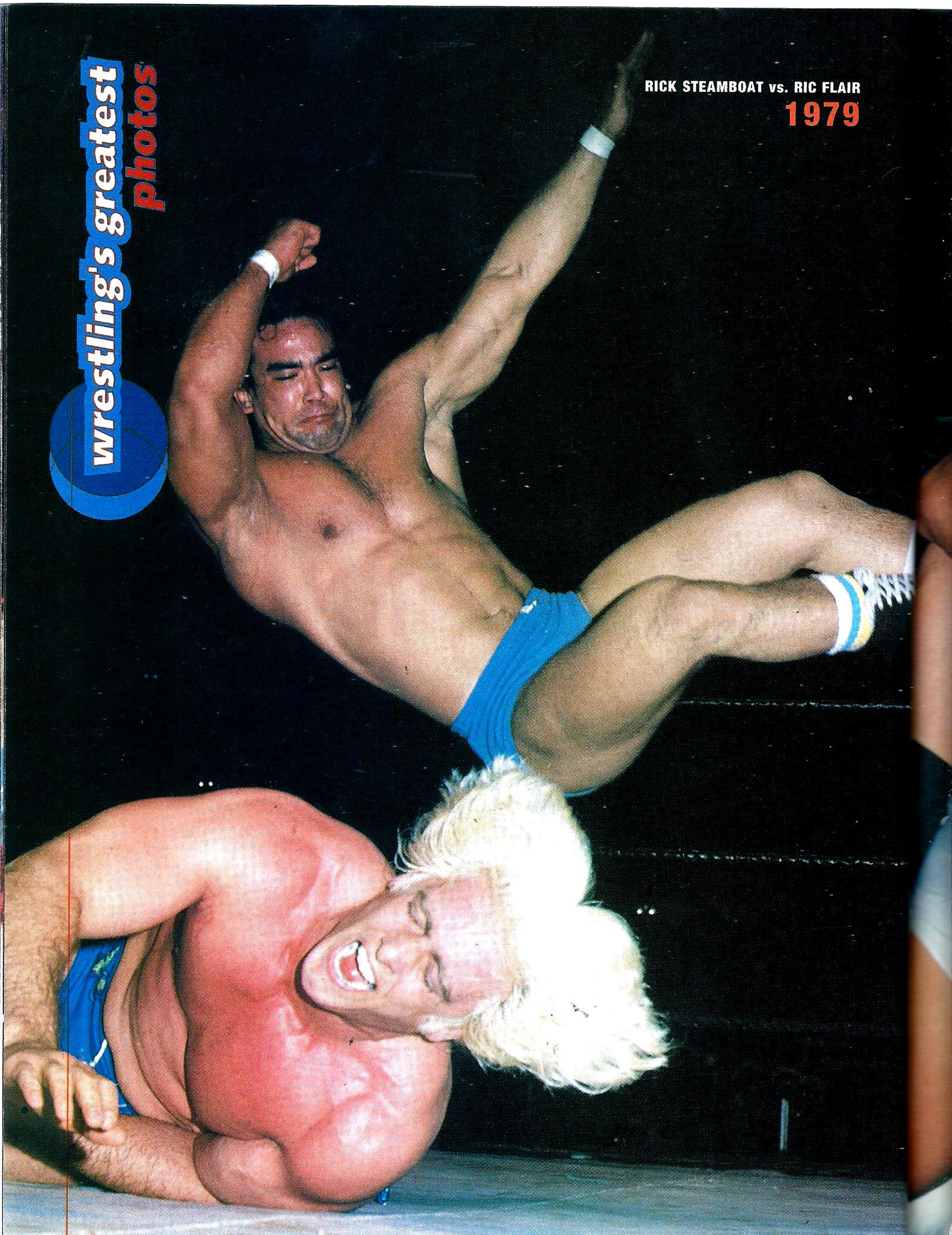
wrestling's greatest photos



RAY STEVENS vs. CRUSHER

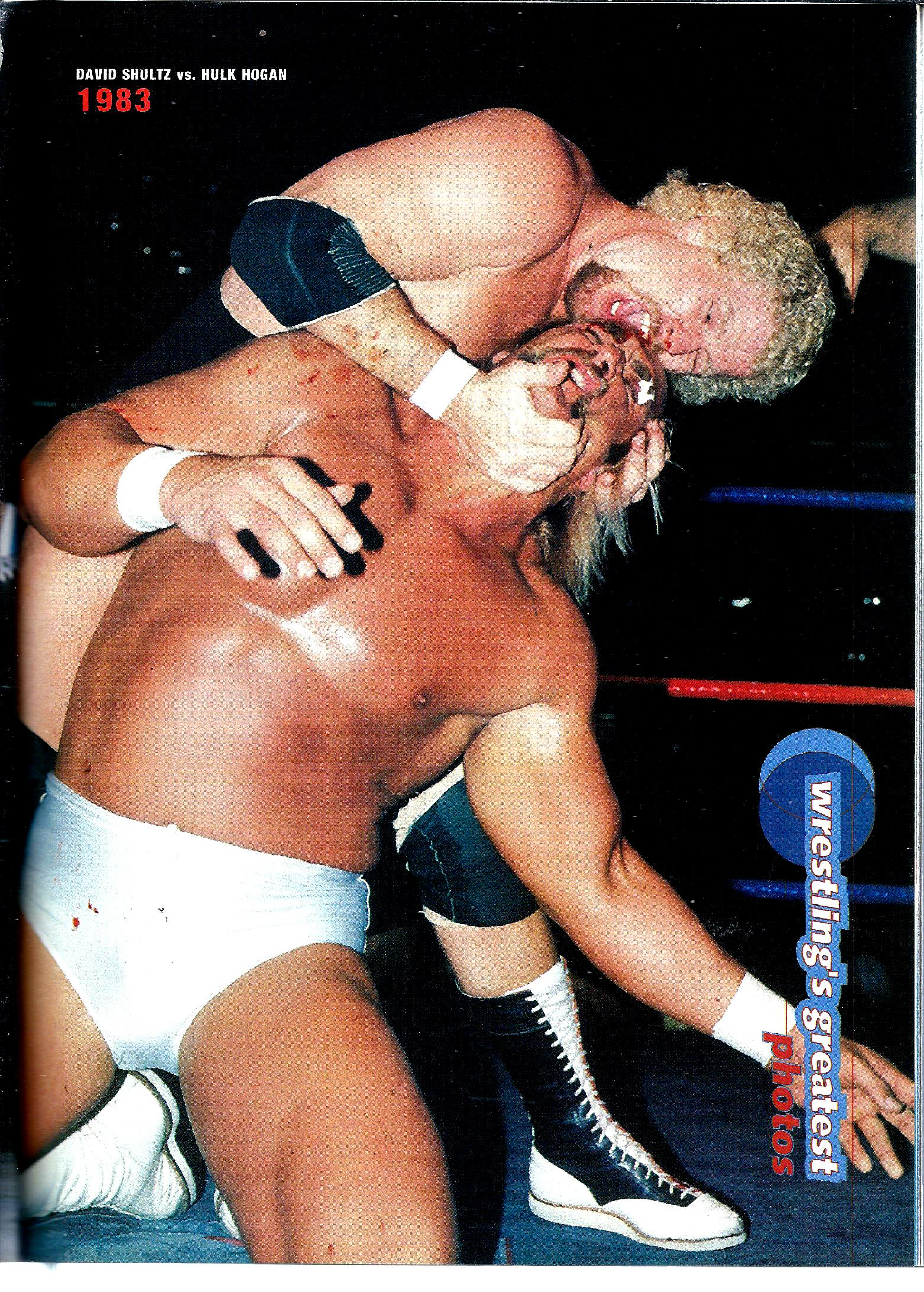
1971

wrestling's greatest photos



RICK STEAMBOAT vs. RIC FLAIR

1979


DAVID SHULTZ vs. HULK HOGAN

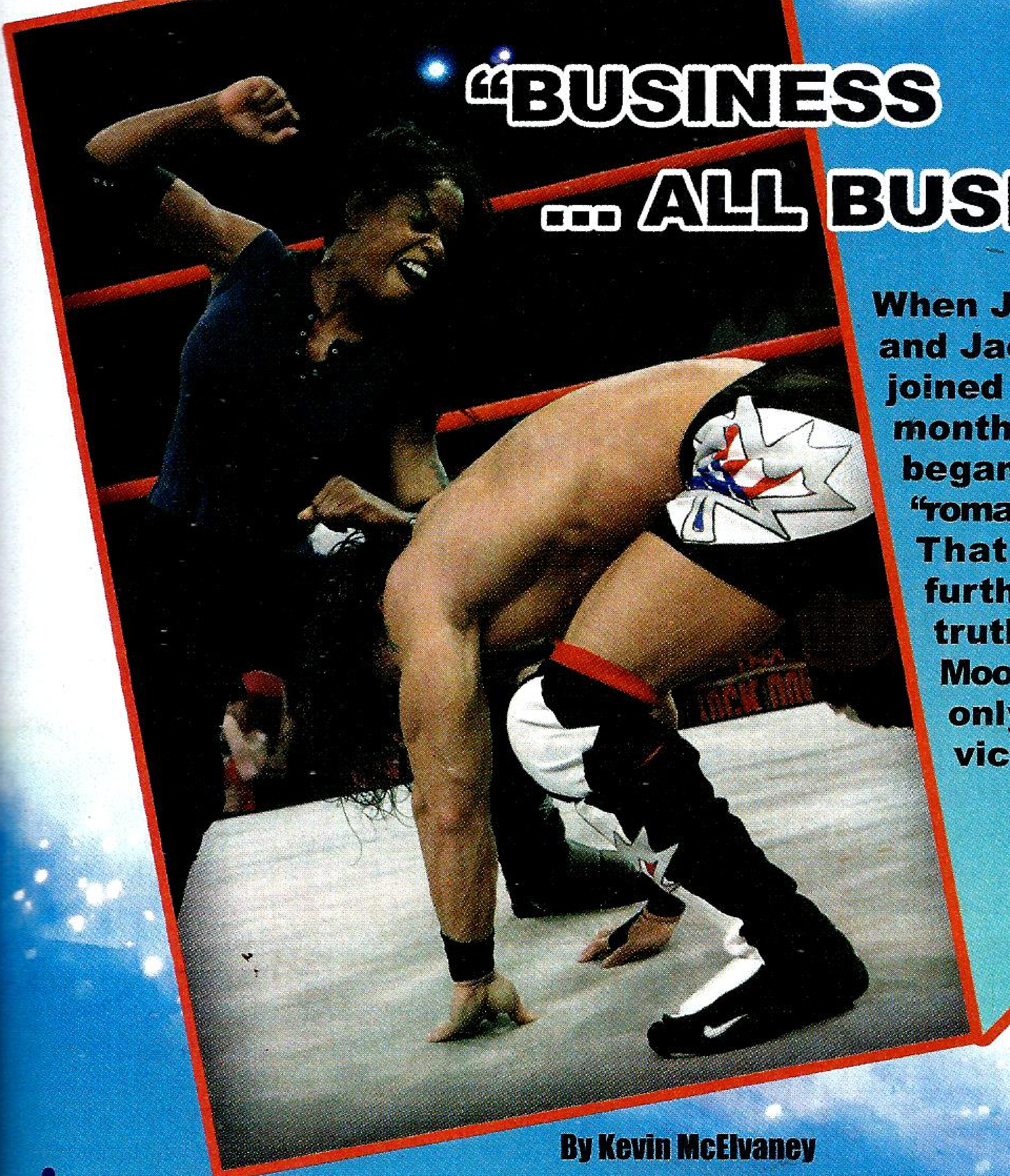
1983

wrestling's greatest photos

WHAT GOES ON BET

WEEN STORM AND JACKIE BEHIND CLOSED DOORS?

"BUSINESS ... ALL BUSINESS!"



When James Storm and Jackie Moore joined forces a few months ago, rumors began circulating of "romantic involvement." That couldn't be further from the truth. Storm and Moore are interested only in ring victories

Photos by Lee South/TNA Wrestling

By Kevin McElvaney

IT'S NEVER WISE to mix business with pleasure, but that's never seemed to matter in pro wrestling. Whenever a man and woman unite for the purpose of business, they often succumb to temptation and become an item romantically. It's destroyed many promising tandems.

It won't happen to "Cowboy" James Storm and Miss Jackie Moore.

Beer bottles became the weapon of choice after James Storm "accidentally" blinded former America's Most Wanted partner Chris Harris with one. Here, Harris gets payback by smashing Storm over the head with a bottle before Storm has a chance to do the same.

The official word on the Storm-Moore alliance is that it's "all business," and we have little reason to believe otherwise. Since her return, Moore has been a dominant force among the TNA Knockouts and a valuable ally for Storm in his feuds with Petey Williams and "Wildcat" Chris Harris. It's unclear whether Storm and Moore fraternize outside of the Impact Zone. What is clear is that Storm and Miss Jackie share an unusual relationship. Unlike most other wrestler/valet duos, Storm and Jackie also function as a veteran tag team, with a mutual respect and meticulous attention to their craft.

"FOR ALL HIS CHARACTER FLAWS, STORM GENUINELY TREATS JACKIE AS AN EQUAL. AND WHY WOULDN'T HE? JACKIE IS AS TOUGH AS THEY COME."

Moore's return to TNA came as a surprise to many, and the circumstances of her comeback were even more surprising. America's Most Wanted partners Storm and Harris were on the outs after Storm had "accidentally" blinded Harris with a beer bottle to the face. Gail Kim, the tandem's manager, was stuck in the middle.

With Kim at ringside, Storm defeated Petey Williams at Final Resolution 2007. After the match, the "Cowboy" handcuffed Williams to the ropes, then revealed a beer bottle that he planned to smash over Williams' head. Kim, who'd had enough, stood in Storm's way. Storm threatened to

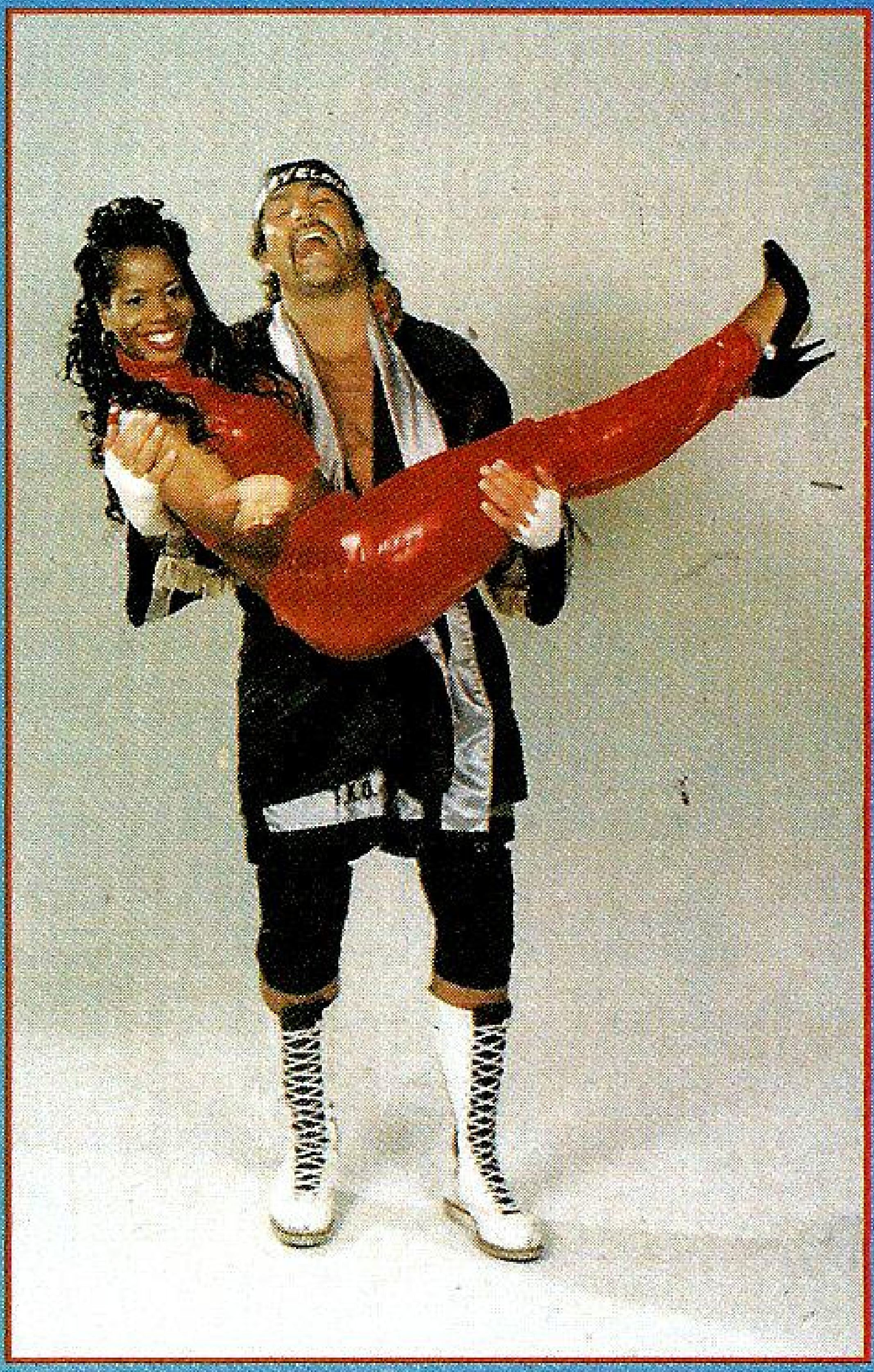
MARC MERO: "JACKIE NEVER MIXES BUSINESS WITH PLEASURE"

One man who knows Jackie Moore very well is former TNA, WWF, and WCW star "Marvelous" Marc Mero. After having difficulty with his wife/valet, Sable (Rena Mero), during his run in WWE, he hired Jackie Moore (then billed as Jacquelyn) to be his new manager. Upon her WWE debut, Jackie did Mero's bidding by declaring war on Sable and then capturing the newly reinstated WWF women's championship.

The relationship between Mero and Jacquelyn was mutually beneficial. Jacquelyn helped Mero with Sable, and Mero helped Jacquelyn retain the women's title on several occasions. Only INSIDE WRESTLING dares to ask the question: Was their relationship also romantic in nature?

"No, never!" replied Mero, laughing. "Jackie's not like that. She's all business in the ring, and she never mixes business with pleasure."

Mero was having a hard time as a singles wrestler at that point in his career, and he suspected Jackie might give him a boost. So, rather than treat her like a subservient valet, Mero looked upon Jackie as a confidante and a partner. Like the current tandem of James Storm and Jackie, the two performed very well in mixed tag matches, particularly against Sable and her partner, Tom Brandi.



Mero knew not to make the same mistake twice

"She was the best thing that could've happened to me at that point," Mero admitted. "I was down on my luck, and, frankly, I wasn't doing my best in the ring. She made me look like a million bucks, and I'd like to think I helped her out, too."

Mero feels that Storm has much to gain from his partnership with Jackie. "Jimmy is a smart boy," he said. "Jackie is unlike any other woman I've worked with. Sure, she's beautiful, and it's a nice feeling to have her walk to the ring with you, but, more importantly, she's really tough.

"And she's smart. She taught me a lot during our time together. There never was any 'thing' between us, and I feel that was definitely the best way."

—Kevin McElvaney

hit Kim with the bottle before the valet struck her charge with a low blow. With Storm vulnerable, Jackie hit the ring.

As a unit, Jackie and Storm made easy work of the courageous Kim. In a symbolic gesture, they planted her with the death sentence, AMW's signature move. As of that moment, Storm's only partner would be the woman known as the "Pride Of Tennessee." They faced the team of Williams and Kim at both Against All Odds and Destination X, coming up victorious on both occasions.

For all his character flaws, Storm genuinely treats Jackie as an equal. And why wouldn't he? Recall that in 1993, Moore, wrestling as Miss Texas in Memphis, was the first woman ever to be selected to the "*PWI* 500." Fourteen years later, she's every bit as tough. After having her two front teeth knocked out in a streetfight with Kim back in April, she simply continued to wrestle. Jackie is also not afraid to face off against the guys, which is what enabled her to get into the 500 at number 483. She regularly became physically involved against both Harris and Williams while Storm feuded with them.

Though Storm might not openly admit it, Moore is also something of a mentor to him. An 18-year veteran, Jackie trained with Gen. Skandor Akbar before debuting in World Class Championship Wrestling in 1989 in Texas, as well as Memphis and other territories. In 1997, Jackie moved to WCW, where she defeated Disco Inferno at Halloween Havoc. After a year in WCW, Jackie signed with the WWF and feuded with Sable. She later became the first-ever African-American to wear the WWF women's belt. She would go on to hold that championship twice, as well as

"STORM AND MOORE SHARE SOUTHERN ROOTS, AS WELL AS A PENCHANT FOR BRAWLING AND HIGH-IMPACT WRESTLING. THEY ARE A PERFECT MATCH."

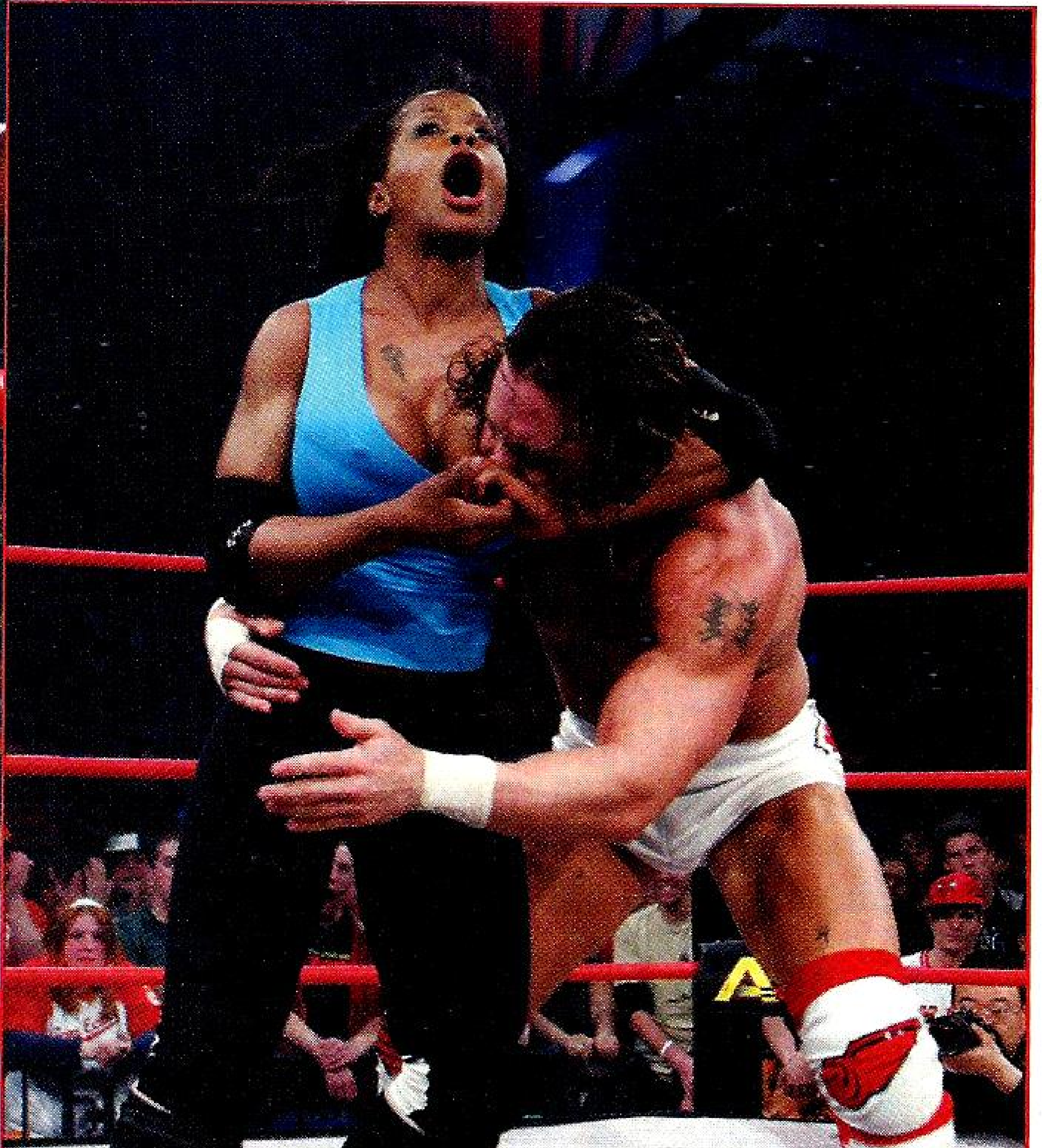
defeat Chavo Guerrero Jr. for the WWE cruiserweight title.

Jackie's experience as a wrestler is broad, varied, and invaluable. Storm certainly had this in mind when he approached her about forming a partnership. Jackie has far more experience than AMW's previous advisor, Kim, and almost as much time in the ring as Storm and Harris combined. Storm and Moore share southern roots, as well as a penchant for brawling and high-impact wrestling. They are a perfect match.

Each time the two compete together, Storm is learning from Moore. This is evident in the way that Moore sets the pace for the team in such matchups. In addition, Moore is a strong presence in Storm's corner during singles competition. Whether by imparting wisdom backstage or physically inserting herself into his matches, Jackie is a valuable asset to the seven-time NWA tag champ.

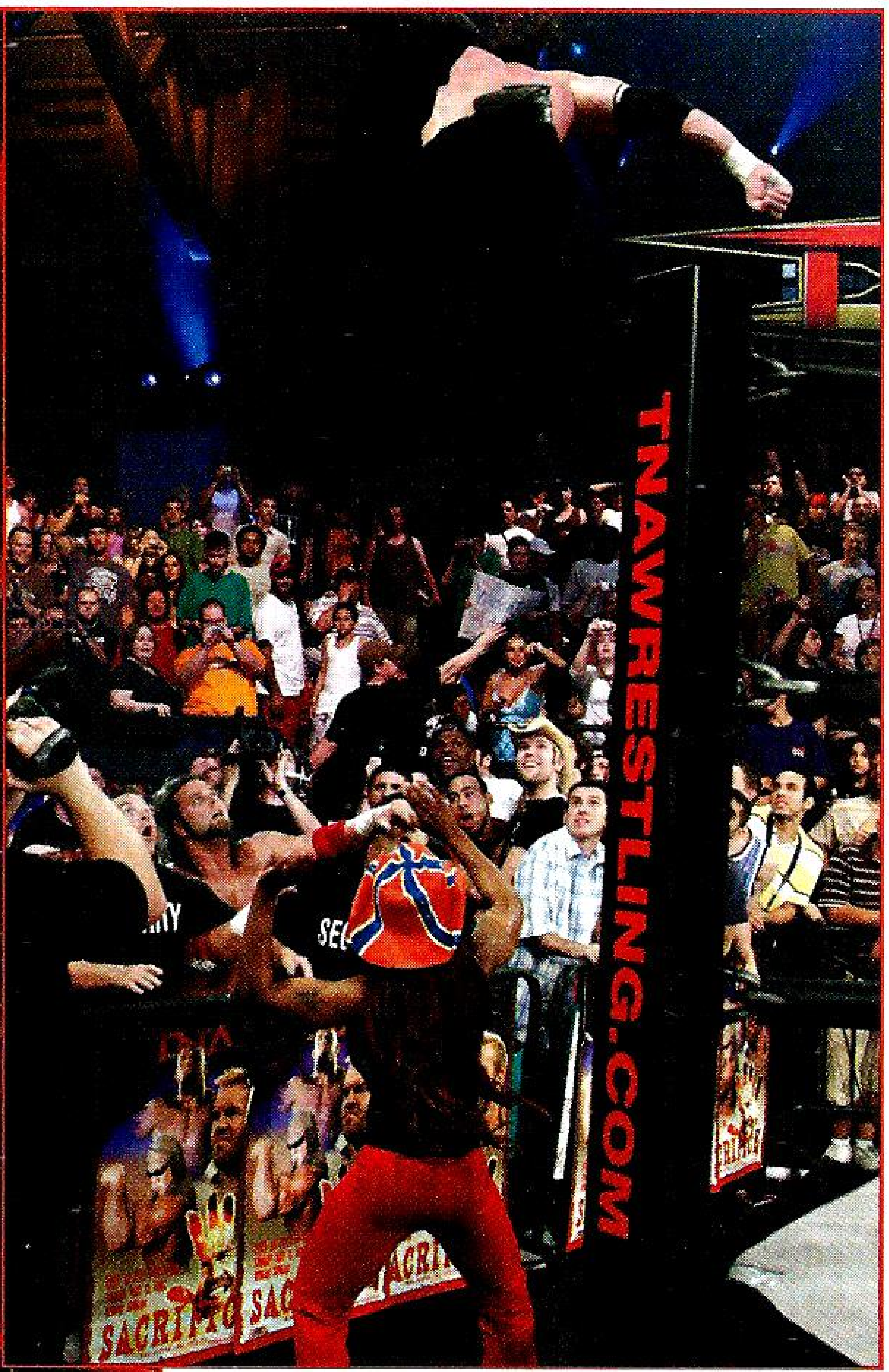
"I'm not sure what to make of this Storm and Jackie thing," said former TNA wrestler Elix Skipper, a man who has had many battles with Storm. "Honestly, I don't even want to think about what they might be up to on their days off. But it seems to be working out for them in the ring."

"No, nothing's going on between those two" said TNA Knockout Christy Hemme. "They'd be wise to make sure nothing develops; sometimes these things just sort of happen. Right now, everything is working for them. If their relationship evolves, that could ruin the whole dynamic."



Storm was in quite a quandary after the AMW split (above). Harris not only had former AMW valet Gail Kim at his side, but also Petey Williams. Fortunately, Storm was able to recruit the "Pride Of Tennessee" Jackie Moore, who helped even out the playing field (right).

The value in Storm's business arrangement with Jackie comes from her years of experience as both a valet/manager and former WWF women's champion. It seems that Jackie is more of an asset to Storm than Kim is to Harris. Storm would be wise not to jeopardize their success with romantic aspirations.



Storm appreciated Miss Jackie not for her beauty, but for her strength and courage to stand by his side, even in the most nerve-racking jams—such as handling a leap off the top rope onto the arena floor by Harris.

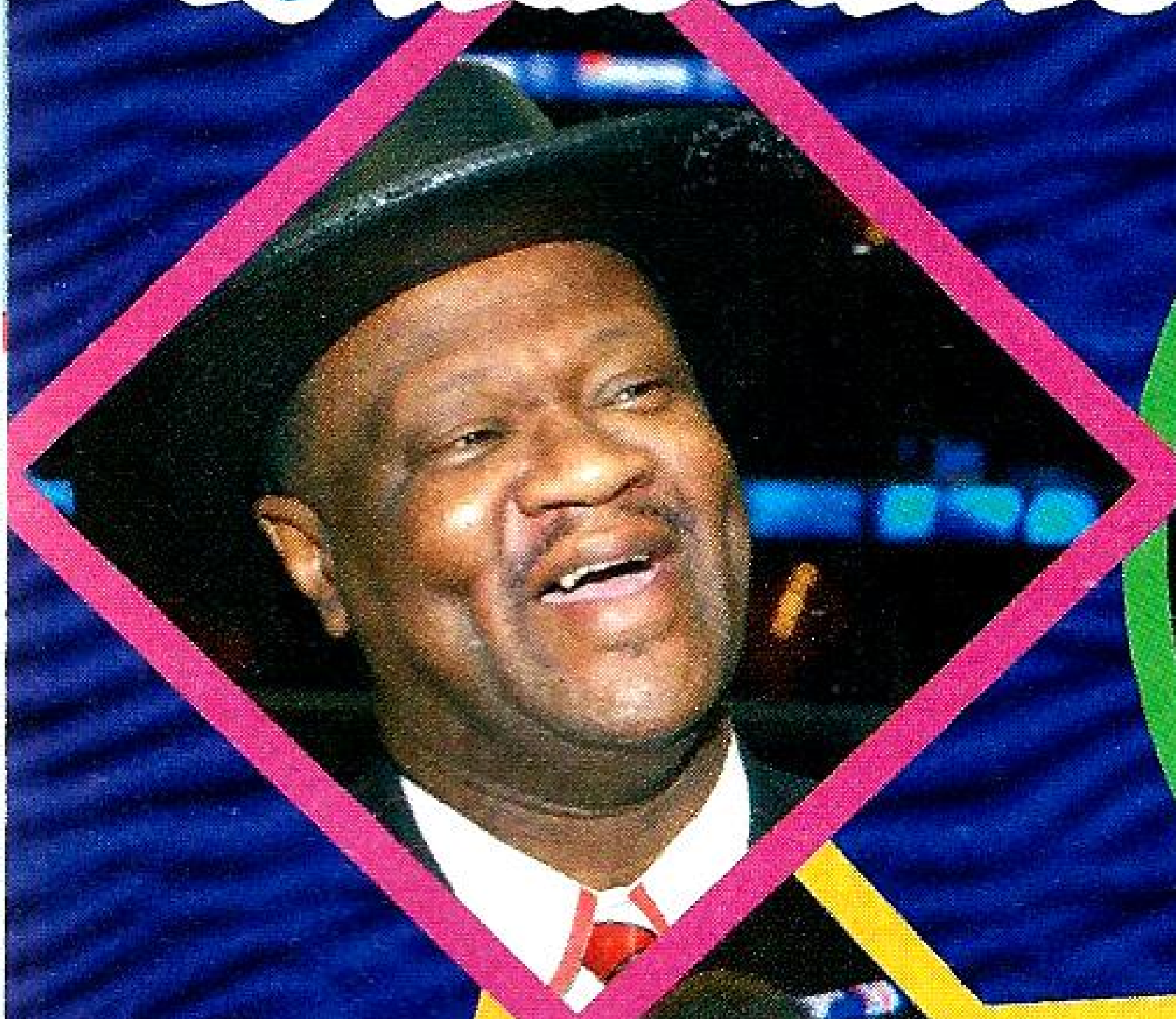
Storm and Moore did not wish to comment when contacted for this story, but their refusal to speak doesn't lend any credibility to speculation that they're an item. Rather, it may be a testament to their focus on what they do *inside* the ring. The less time they spend worrying about emotional attachments, the better they are likely to do in actual competition.

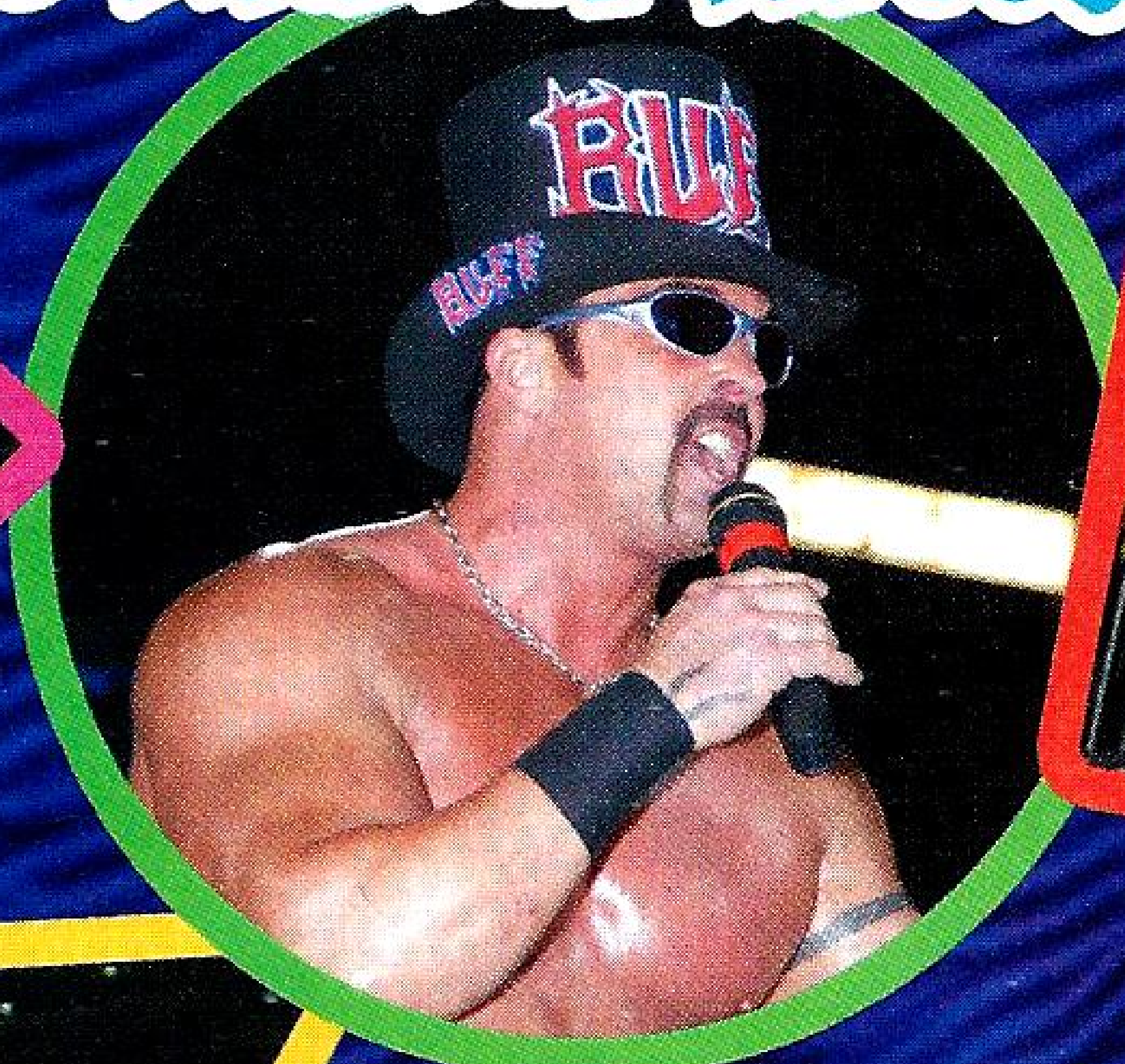
"I've got my eye—and my camera—on them whenever I possibly can," said TNA's resident paparazzi, Alex Shelley. "All kidding aside, though, there's nothing going on between Jimmy and Jackie. But, man, they're really doing well for themselves by confusing everybody else."

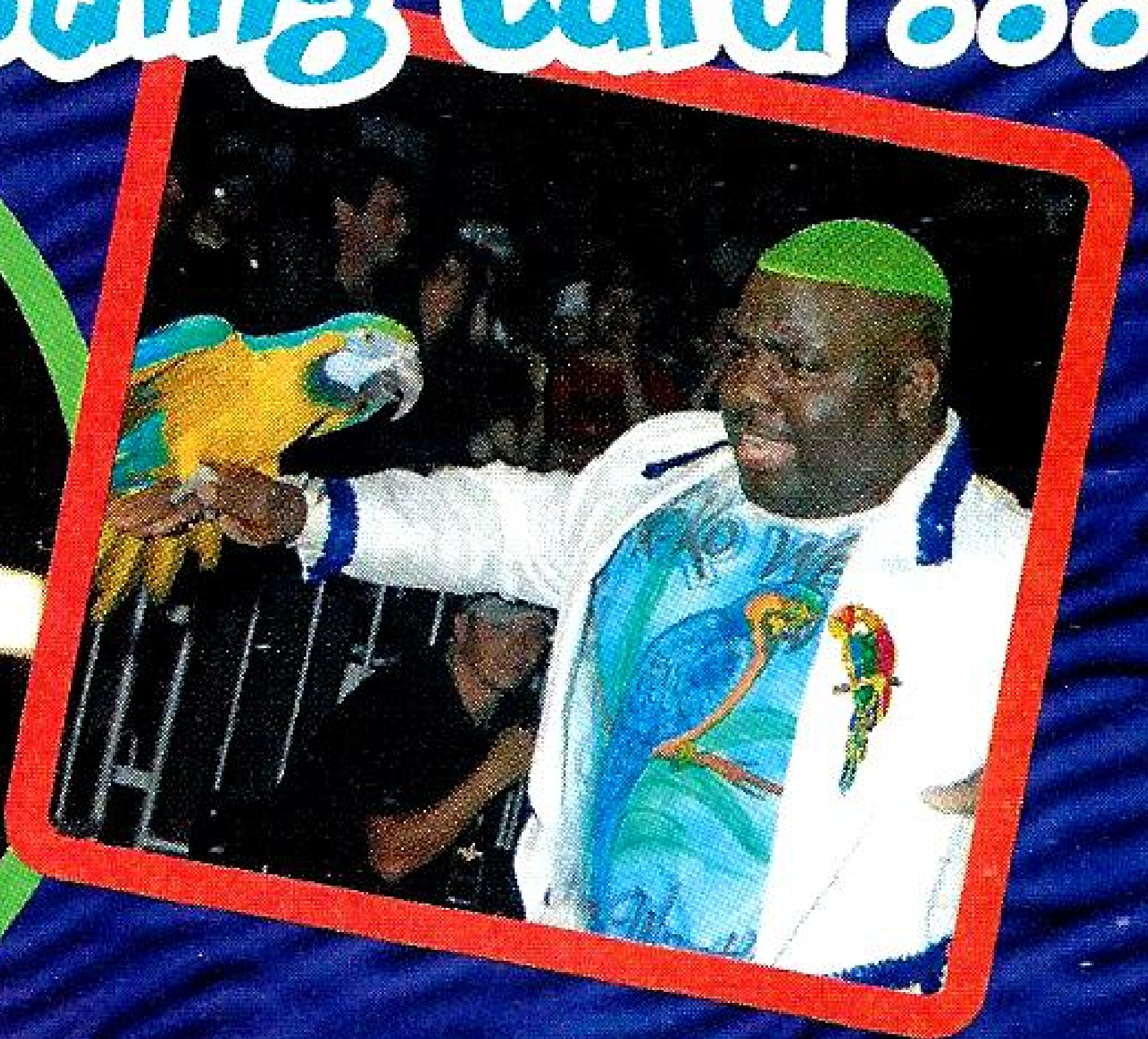
Judging by their current success, Storm and Moore should remain a dangerous tandem for some time to come ... as long as there's no funny business, monkey business, or risky business—just business, *all* business. ☐

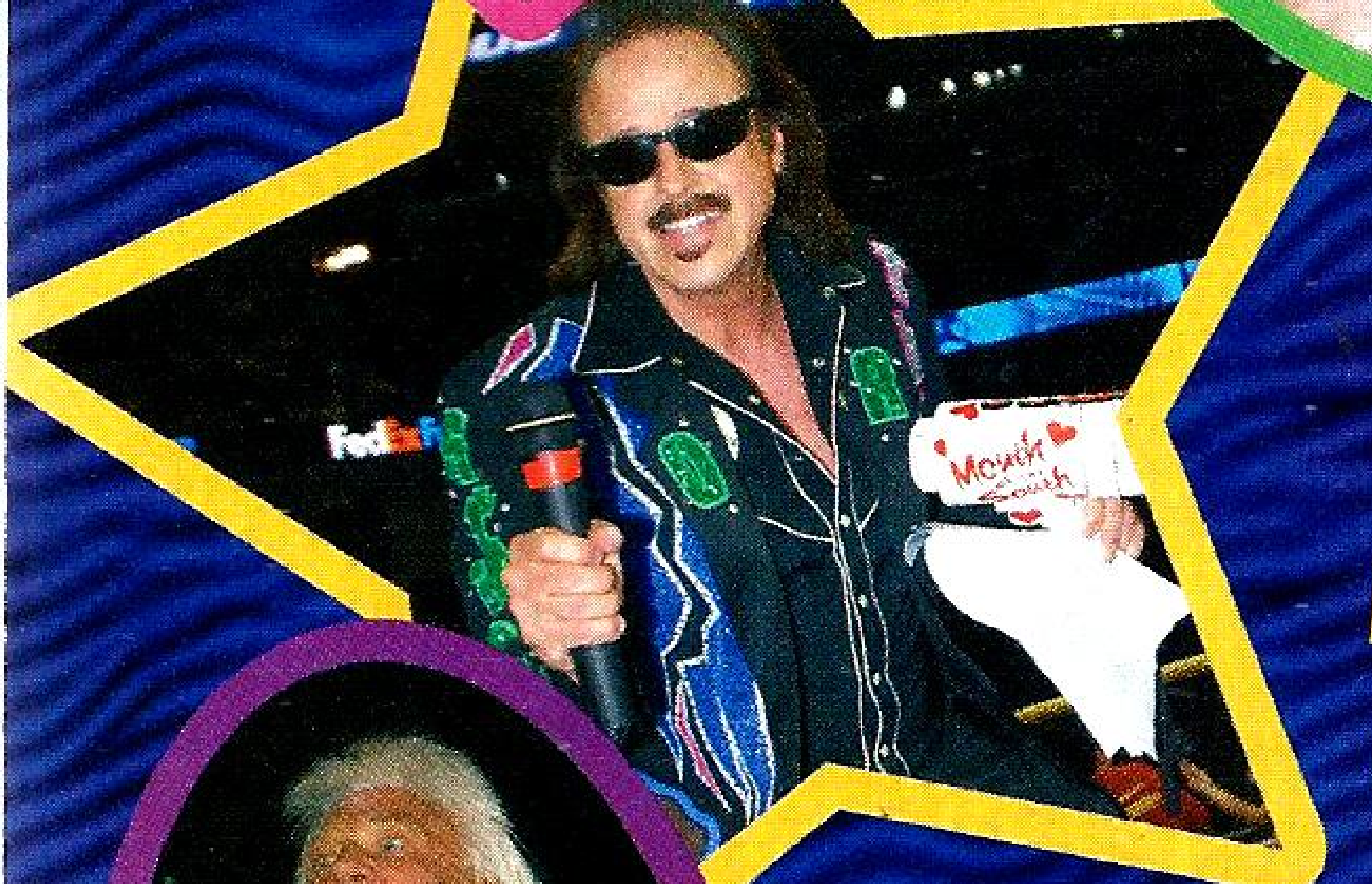
MEMPHIS

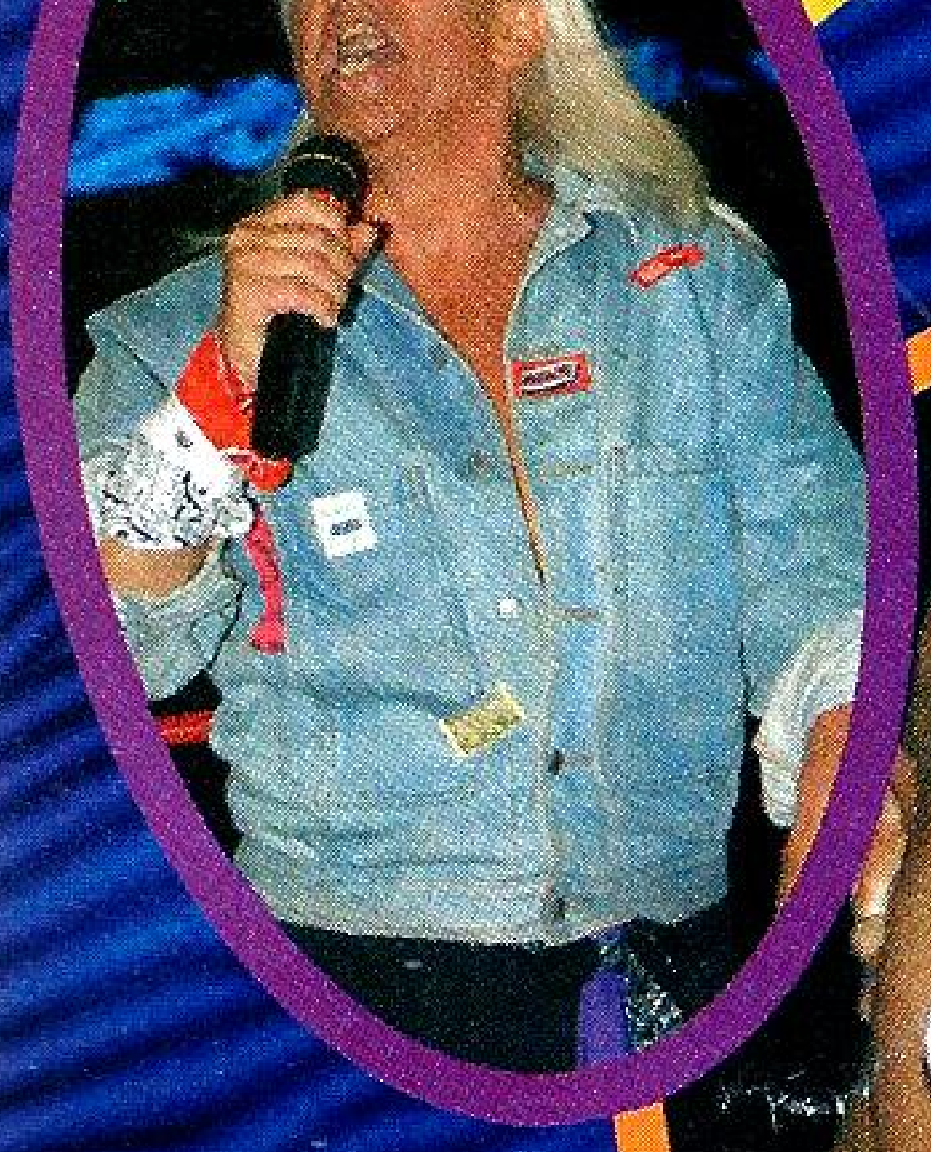
It Was More Than A Wrestling Card ...











The match that should have happened in Detroit happened in Memphis, and that was enough to make the "Clash Of Legends" event very special. But there was more to this affair than Hogan vs. Big Show

IT WAS A PARTY!

Cory Macklin was faced with a huge problem just eight days before his big Clash of Legends show in Memphis: Half of his main event canceled. But the promoter kept his cool and found a worthy replacement for Jerry Lawler in Paul "Big Show" Wight.

Hogan-Wight match was never booked for Detroit and, suddenly, WrestleMania's loss was Memphis' gain.

Rewind several months. Enter Cory Macklin, Memphis promoter, TV commentator, and lifelong wrestling fan. Macklin and Memphis mainstay Jerry Lawler began planning for the annual Clash of Legends card by asking themselves a simple question: "How can we give back to the fans in Memphis?"

"The fans are what this business is all about," said Macklin. "If it wasn't for the fans, there wouldn't be wrestling. We wanted to give the fans something special."

"The crowd in Memphis wanted two things: to see their favorite legends shine in the spotlight one more time and to pay tribute to one of the all-time greats, Hulk Hogan."

It didn't take long for Macklin to come up with something *very* special: Lawler vs. Hogan in a rematch over two decades in the making. To set up the bout, Lawler used the *Memphis Championship Wrestling* program to air clips of him beating a very young Hulk "pre-Hulkamania, brother" Hogan. Before long, "The Hulkster" accepted Lawler's challenge. The date was set. The place: Memphis' historic Mid-South Coliseum, the site of so many legendary moments in wrestling history. The event: "Clash of Legends."

"I wanted to give the fans a card of marquee matches with marquee wrestlers," said Macklin.

And that's exactly what he did, assembling such legendary names such as Brutus Beefcake, Koko Ware, Bobby Eaton, Greg Valentine, Abdullah the Butcher, and Buff Bagwell.

"When [Macklin] asked me, I jumped on board, baby," said Koko Ware. "Memphis has always been great to me, and this was a chance for 'The Birdman' to say thanks to the fans."

In the weeks leading up to Clash, the buzz around Memphis was undeniable. From restaurants to bars to grocery stores, everyone seemed to be talking about Hogan-Lawler. The excitement of the event grew to such proportions that a change in venue was made, moving the card from the Mid-South Coliseum to the much newer and larger FedExForum.

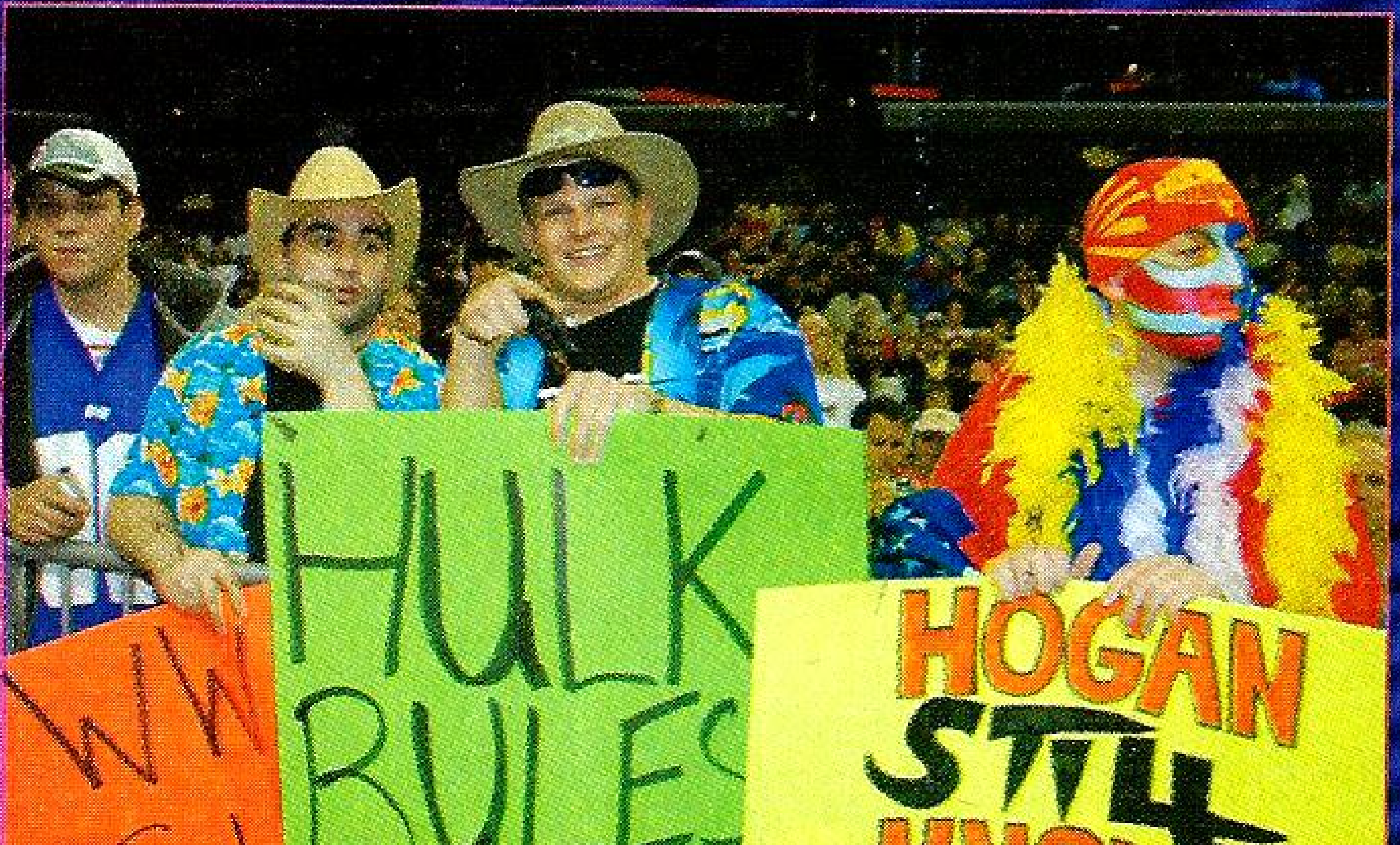
Though the location change was, in part, due to the Coliseum not meeting the guidelines of the Americans with Disabilities Act, others cite accelerated ticket sales as the reason for the move. After all, the Hogan-Lawler match was huge, certainly the biggest match Memphis had seen in decades. And with ticket sales on the rise, the decision to move to the larger arena made sense.

Then, with Clash just eight days away, a bombshell hit. WWE informed Lawler that he wouldn't be able to appear at the event. The rationale was that footage from the show would appear on *Hogan Knows Best* on Viacom-owned VH1, a competitor of USA Network. The fact that Smackdown appears on the Viacom-owned CW gave credence to the notion that Vince McMahon simply wanted to sabotage the show.

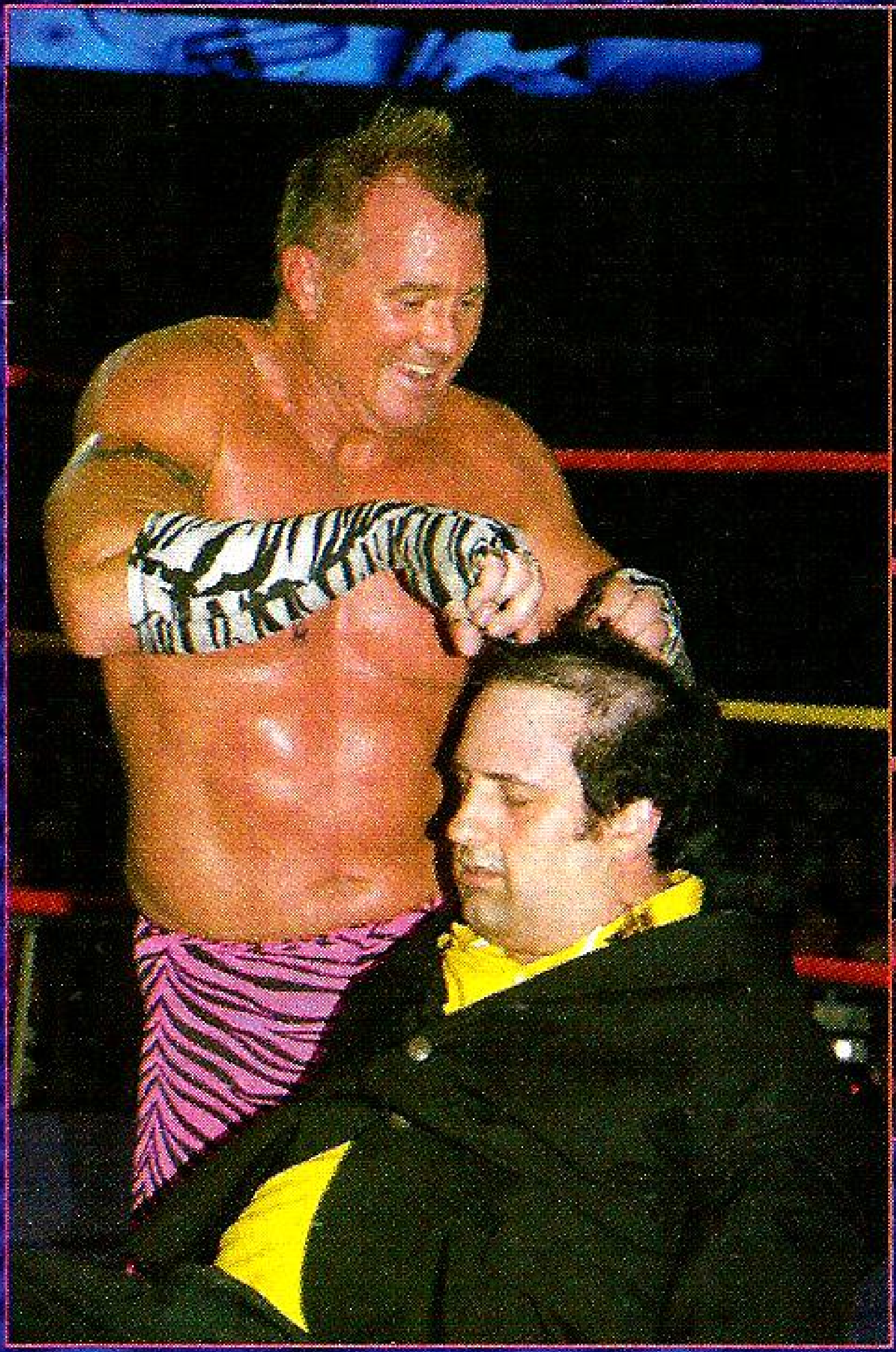
The news came as a major surprise to Macklin, who has had a positive relationship with WWE in recent years.

"They'd frequently send their guys to my territory to work shows," explained Macklin. "It was a great arrangement."

A great arrangement that ended abruptly with McMahon's decision to pull Lawler, as well as Shelton Benjamin, Charlie Haas, The Boogeyman, and Robert Gibson, from the card. Macklin suddenly found himself dealing with a promoter's worst nightmare—a canceled main event. Nevertheless, Macklin remained calm and took action.



It's no surprise that Hulk Hogan was the main attraction of the Memphis event, but "Hulkamaniacs" who showed up were also treated to an array of bouts featuring other stars of the past.



10AM-5:30PM MON-FRI
MON-FRI, & NOON-5PM SAT
PEPSI
MOONDOG CUJO

Brutus "The Barber" Beefcake brushed up on his hair-trimming skills, thanks to The Assassins' manager, Sal Corrente (left). The Barbarian brought his best against Moondog Cujo in the opening match (above), but Cujo's shovel proved to be the equalizer.

"I had promised the people of Memphis a great show, and I was not about to disappoint them," he said.

Macklin contacted Hogan and within 24 hours, they'd found Lawler's replacement: Paul "Big Show" Wight. Not surprisingly, the fan response was immediate and positive.

"I've been a 'Hulkamaniac' since 1985," said fan Hal Tomlinson, who traveled from Minneapolis to attend the show. "No way I was going to miss this match!"

Days later, Tomlinson was one of many "Hulkamaniacs" inside the FedExForum. The fans watched with glee as the undercard matches took place. In the opener, Moondog Cujo defeated the mighty Barbarian. Then, it was Greg Valentine besting Mr. Hughes. From there, fans watched a thrilling three-way ladies match in which Jazz beat Miss Passion and Christie Ricci. Abdullah the Butcher wrestled to a brutal no-contest with Al Green. The Slick-managed team of Koko Ware and Bobby Eaton suffered a loss to Bill Dundee and Dutch Mantell, seconded by Jimmy Valiant. Longtime Hogan friend Brutus Beefcake teamed with radio personality Bubba the Love Sponge to defeat The New Assassins. And, in two other matches, Brian Christopher scored a win over Buff Bagwell while Rick Morton and Kid Kash defeated Too Cool 2 to win the Southern tag team championship.

Then it was time for the main event, a 20-minute battle between Hogan and Wight that ended—much like the Hogan-Andre encounter—with Hulk pinning the giant after a bodyslam and legdrop.

Predictable? Maybe. Fun? Absolutely. The fans that attended the "Clash of Legends" knew what to expect when they bought their tickets. It wasn't a "Money In The Bank" or TLC match or even a bout between two up-and-coming grapplers. The crowd in Memphis wanted two things: to see their favorite legends shine in the spotlight one more time and to pay tribute to one of the all-time greats, Hulk Hogan. And that's exactly what they got.

"I can't wait for next year's card," said Tomlinson. "WWE can have their big supershows, but Memphis is where the party's at!" ☐

The Memphis Championship Wrestling card truly showcased a little bit of everything—even a title change. Rick Morton and Kid Kash (subbing for Robert Gibson) wrestled as the "New" Rock 'n' Roll Express and won the Southern tag team championship from Too Cool 2 (Tim Grind and Flex).

THE SMACKDOWN CURSE

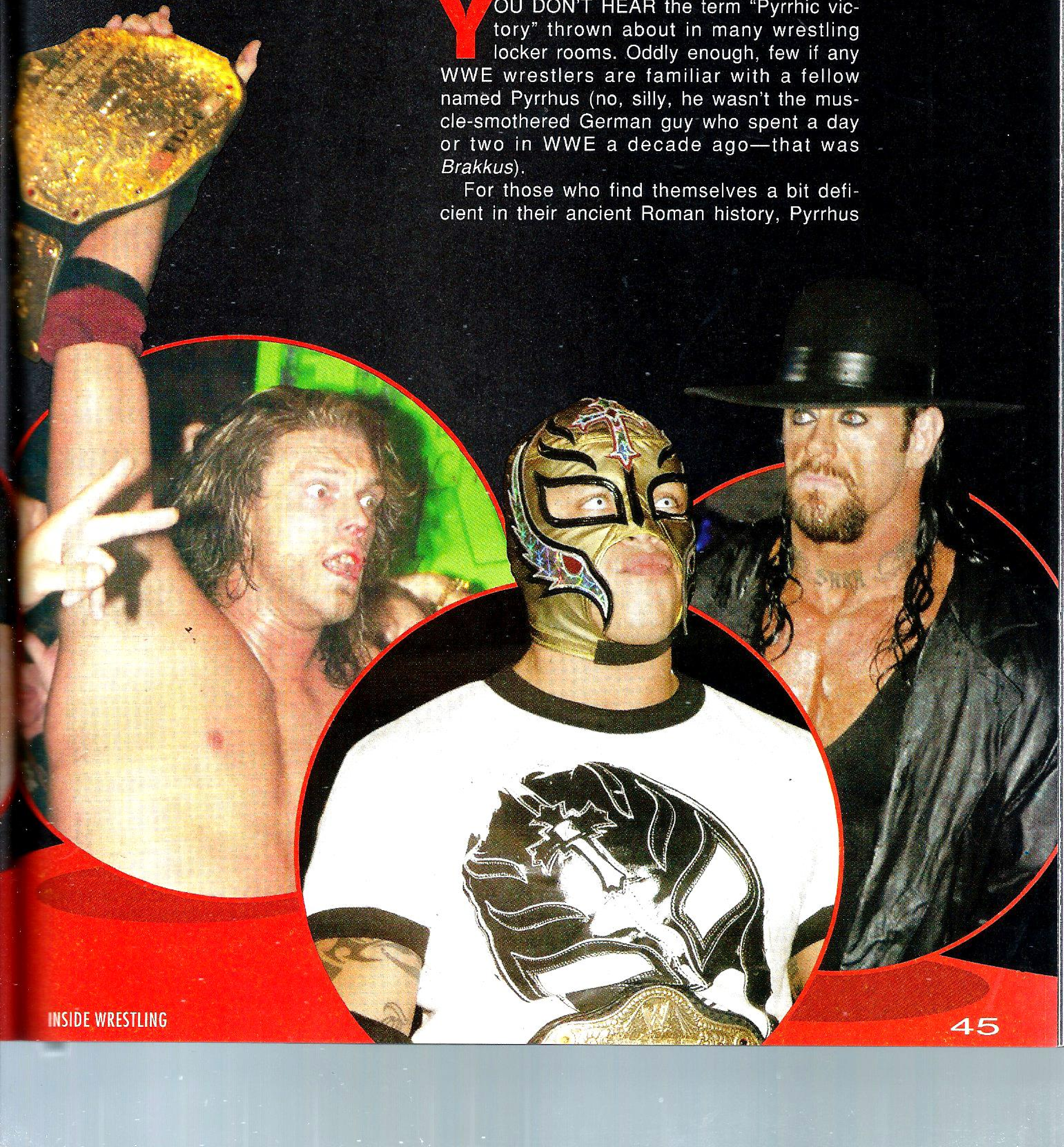
This Is The Title You Don't Want To Win

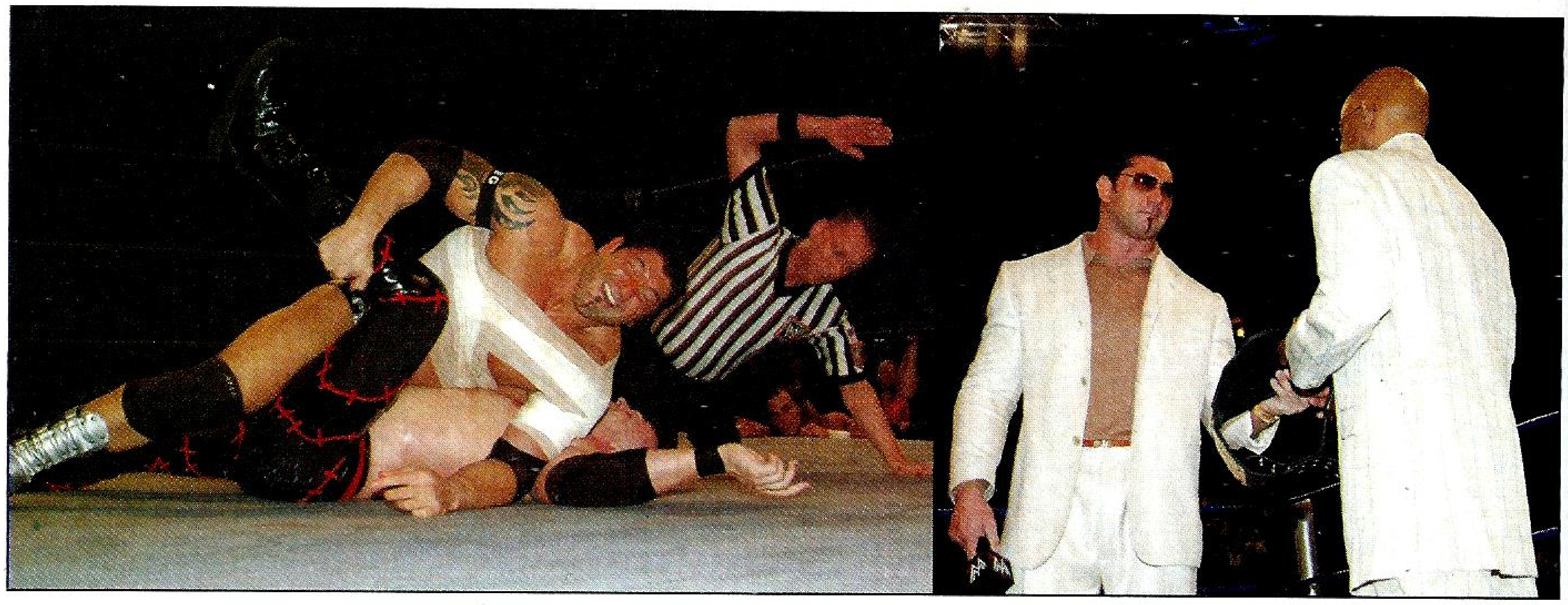
It ought to be a dream come true for virtually any wrestler to win the Smackdown World title. That is, until you take a close look at recent Smackdown history. Those who do might decide a nice feud with The Miz is a much better career path

By Dave Lenker

YOU DON'T HEAR the term "Pyrrhic victory" thrown about in many wrestling locker rooms. Oddly enough, few if any WWE wrestlers are familiar with a fellow named Pyrrhus (no, silly, he wasn't the muscle-smothered German guy who spent a day or two in WWE a decade ago—that was *Brakkus*).

For those who find themselves a bit deficient in their ancient Roman history, Pyrrhus





Batista tried to fight through a triceps injury (above left, against Kane) but, in January 2006, the pain was too much for even him to bear. With surgery his only option, Batista was forced to relinquish the Smackdown championship belt to General Manager Teddy Long (above right).

"Edge's capture of the Smackdown World title was opportunism at its finest, and it was brilliant, provided that the 'Rated R Superstar' doesn't believe in curses."

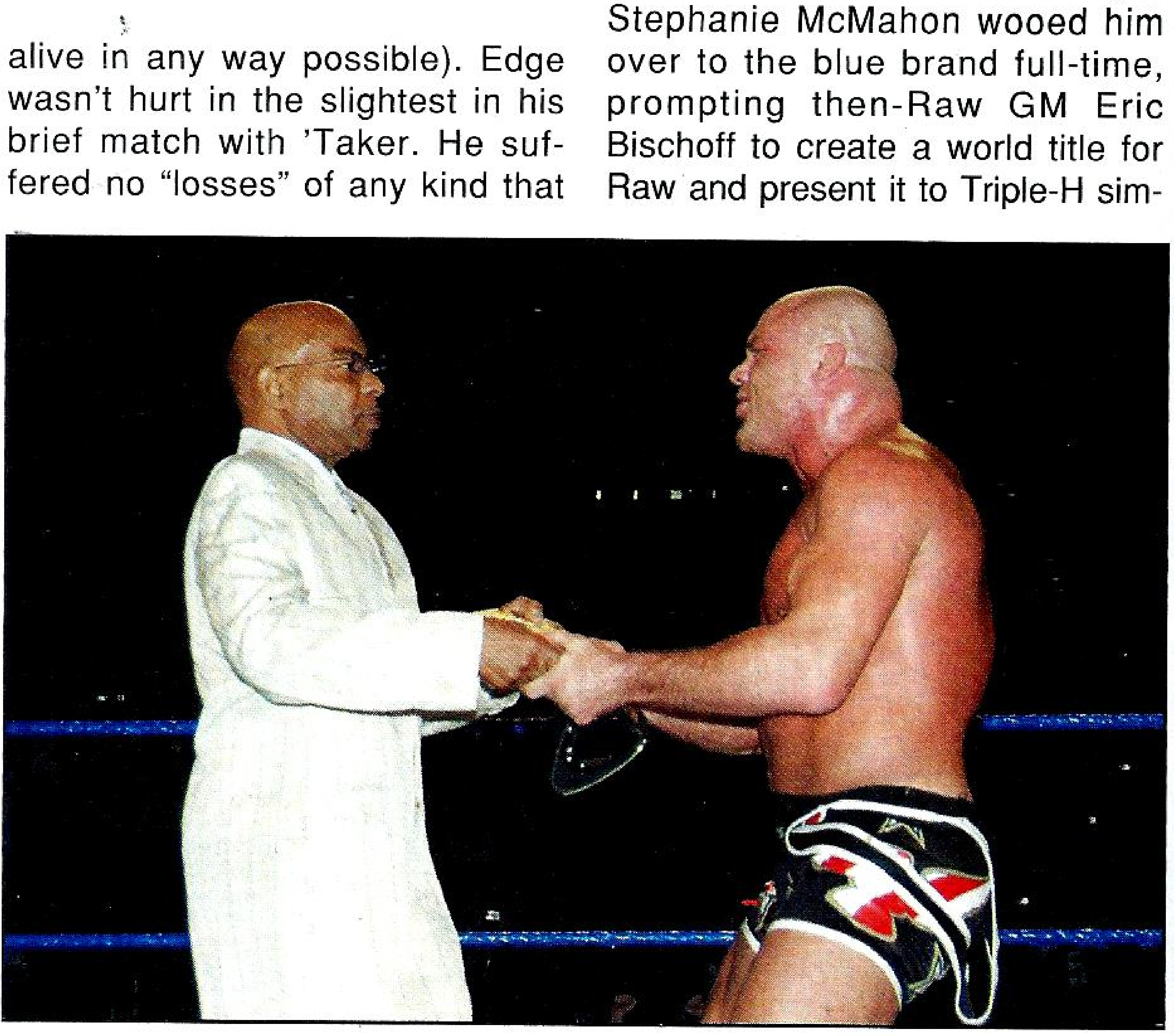
was the king of Epirus almost 2,300 years ago—long before Ric Flair had a single world title on his resume—and a fine king he was. His army defeated the mighty Roman army in the appropriately named Pyrrhic War at Heraclea in 280 B.C. and at Asculum in 279 B.C. The term "Pyrrhic victory" came to be because the Epirians suffered such huge losses in getting the win that it could hardly be considered much of a victory at all. In fact, Pyrrhus was reported to have said that one more "victory" like that would "utterly undo him."

King Booker of Smackdownius should be able to identify with Pyrrhus. So should The Undertaker, Rey Mysterio Jr., Kurt Angle, Batista, John Bradshaw Layfield, the family of Eddie Guerrero, The Big Show, and even Brock Lesnar. Edge also pulled off a Pyrrhic victory of sorts on May 8, the night on which he cashed in his "Money In The Bank" title shot and defeated an injured, weary, and vulnerable Undertaker for the Smackdown World championship.

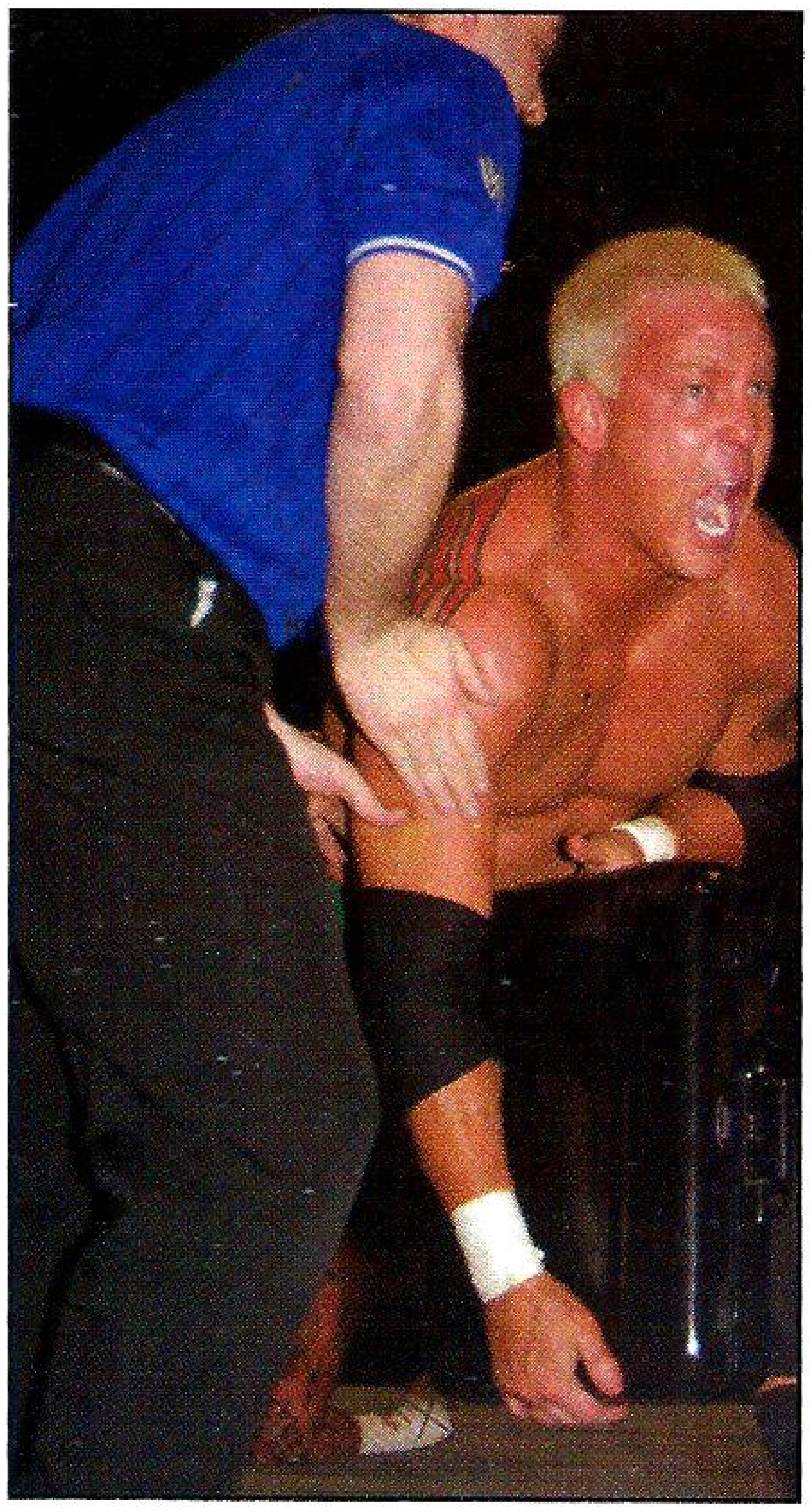
See, we're taking some liberties with the term "Pyrrhic victory" here (ol' Pyrrhus would probably appreciate us keeping his name alive in any way possible). Edge wasn't hurt in the slightest in his brief match with 'Taker. He suffered no "losses" of any kind that night—not physical, not mental, not psychological, not emotional. But if a certain trend continues, his reign will become something of a Pyrrhic victory.

Others have suffered such a fate.

Brock Lesnar cleanly defeated The Rock for the unified WWE World championship five SummerSlams ago. Shortly thereafter, then-Smackdown General Manager Stephanie McMahon wooed him over to the blue brand full-time, prompting then-Raw GM Eric Bischoff to create a world title for Raw and present it to Triple-H sim-



Kurt Angle felt like a lucky man after his surprise win of the vacant Smackdown World title in January 2006, but, since holding the belt, Angle's luck has taken a turn, battling with chronic pain, a painkiller addiction, a release from WWE, and steroid-use accusations. Perhaps it would have been better to leave the belt with Teddy Long.



Even getting too close to the cursed title can cause a wrestler to get his name on the injured list. Ken Kennedy won the "Money In The Bank" title match at WrestleMania 23 with plans to cash it in for the Smackdown World title at WrestleMania 24, but he, too, injured his triceps and lost the title shot to Edge.

ply because he was soon to be the boss' son-in- ... *er, um*—simply because he was the top star of Raw. Lesnar became recognized as the first Smackdown World champion by default.

The "Next Big Thing" had all the necessary tools to be one of the greatest WWE stars of all-time. Except, as we all discovered less than 20 months later, his enthusiasm for pro wrestling and the accompanying lifestyle lessened, and he hasn't been seen in a WWE ring since WrestleMania XX. Following an attempt to make it in the NFL, a little fun with Rena "Sable" Mero, a stint as IWGP champion in Japan, some assorted hunting and fishing, and whatever else he does in Minnesota, he has embarked on a career in mixed martial arts competition. Ask him and he'll tell you everything has worked out splendidly. For WWE and all of us who like to

Five Years, 11 Champions

...Ranking The Smackdown World Champions

Detailing the history of the championship this magazine now calls the WWE Smackdown World title is a complicated endeavor, but for our purposes here, it is the title that has been defended mainly on Smackdown shows since the WWE World championship was essentially split in two after SummerSlam 2002. There have been 11 men atop the Smackdown heap over the past five years. We rank the first 10 for you here (it's impossible to rank Edge at this point), in descending order:

10. The Undertaker. Props to the "Dead Man" for his gutsy performance against Batista in that cage match. He was wrestling with a torn biceps. They also had a great last-man-standing match at Backlash that also ended in a draw. But no victories of note during a reign cut short by injury hurts his ranking.

9. The Big Show. Handing Lesnar his first pinfall loss in WWE counts for something, but not that much, really.

8. King Booker. Almost seven months with the belt, but they weren't seven great months. The King Booker nonsense reminds us of The Honky Tonk Man 20 years ago. Over the top and kind of funny, but hardly worthy of the main event.

7. Rey Mysterio Jr. His title win five months after the death of his close friend, Eddie Guerrero, didn't mean as much as maybe it should have, and it seemed contrived. It did, however, last longer than many predicted.

6. Eddie Guerrero. Only a two-month reign, but huge wins over Lesnar and Angle, and it felt special.

5. Kurt Angle. A total of three reigns, but he was always getting upstaged by Lesnar. And even when he was a champion in WWE, it just never felt like he was *the man.*

4. John Cena. Tough to rank because his first world title reign in WWE was divided between stints with Raw and Smackdown. But he never lost the belt while wrestling for the blue team.

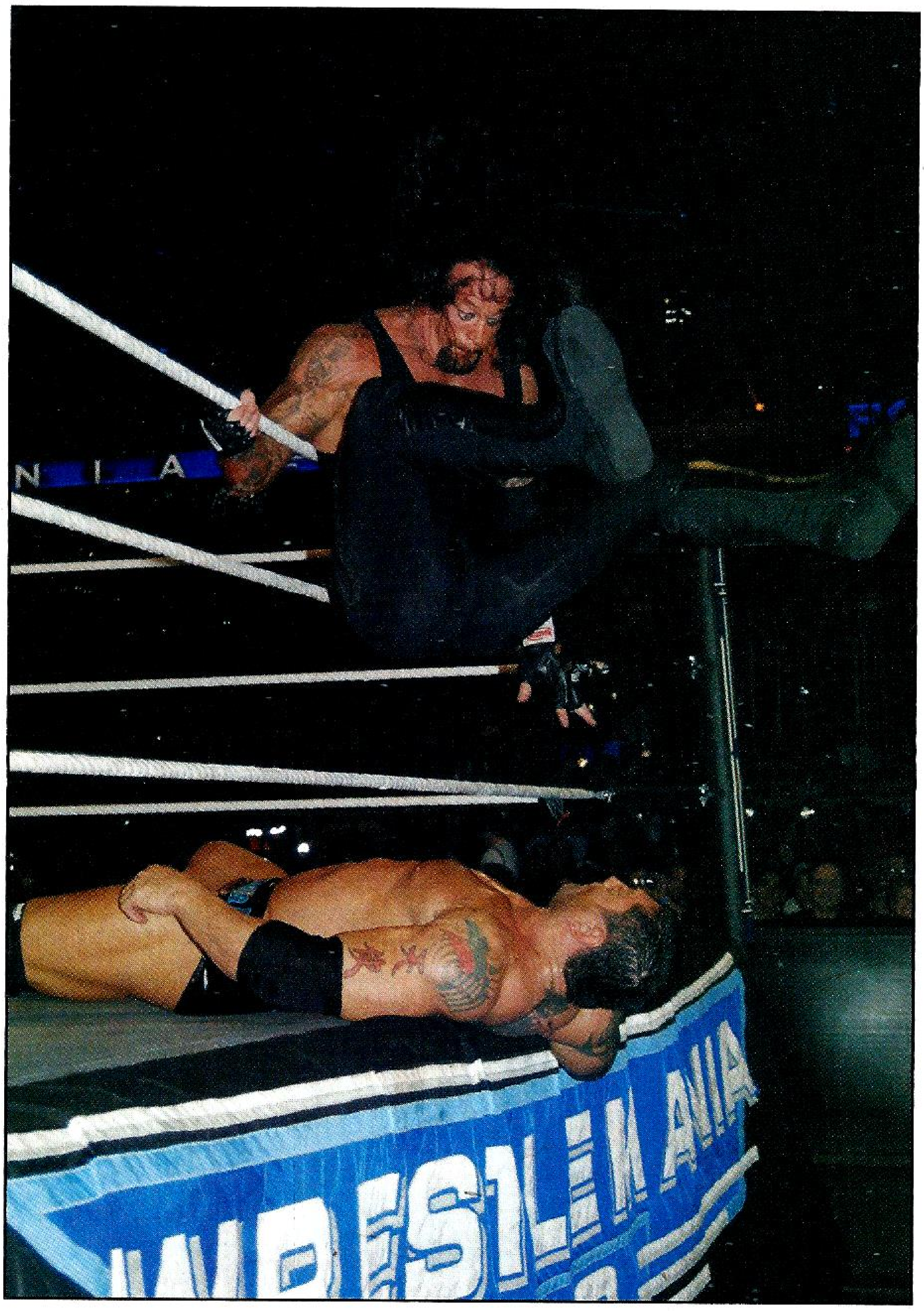
3. John Bradshaw Layfield. He was the underdog in every single title defense. Okay, it was a down period for Smackdown, but his nine-month-plus reign looks surprisingly strong with a historical perspective.

2. Batista. Two reigns and counting, and his career appears to be back on the upswing. Most of his wins during his first reign were extremely decisive, and it might have lasted far longer than six months had he not gotten hurt.

1. Brock Lesnar. Still the gold standard. Every Lesnar match felt very important, and there weren't many bad ones. A great rivalry with Angle helped a lot. Imagine what he could have done had he loved pro wrestling.

—Dave Lenker

No heart for this sport



A stellar performance and title win at WrestleMania against Batista had viewers convinced that The Undertaker was better than ever despite his advancing age. But his reign lasted only a little over a month when he lost the belt to Edge due to a tear of his right biceps.

watch great wrestling and planned on enjoying Lesnar wrestling matches for years to come ... not so well.

"Heck, it's only been two years since JBL claimed the Smackdown title, and a back injury has moved him from Smackdown rings to the Smackdown broadcast table."

The Big Show was the first man to pin Lesnar in WWE. Big Show ended up in a convoluted alliance with Paul Heyman and held the belt for but a month. He battled injuries over the next four years, bounced from brand to brand and back, flip-flopped between heel and fan favorite, ended up ECW champion, and decided late last year to let his contract expire, get a little rest, and ponder his next move (acting or TNA?). He was last seen losing to Hulk Hogan at an independent show in Memphis in April.

Eddie Guerrero ended the third and last Smackdown title reign of Lesnar at No Way Out 2005 and defeated Angle at WrestleMania 21. He hoped to help usher in a new era of great technical wrestling in WWE, but he dropped the belt to John Bradshaw Layfield two months later. His story ended in the ultimate personal tragedy in November 2005, when he was found dead in a hotel room in Minnesota hours before a TV taping was to begin.

Heck, it's only been two years since JBL claimed the Smackdown title, and a back injury has moved him from Smackdown rings to the Smackdown broadcast table. He's sort of unofficially retired, but that could very well turn out to be a permanent retirement.

Batista worked through a torn muscle in his back suffered at the hands of Mark Henry late in 2005, but felt that it was important that he wrestle through the pain and continue as Smackdown champion. The Smackdown title curse refused to give up so easily, however, and a torn triceps suffered a few months later finally forced him to give up the belt.

That gave the ever-opportunistic Angle a chance to claim the gold in a battle royal. But when in the past few years has Angle *not* been hurting badly from any of a laundry list of persistent injuries (whether he admits it or not)? He was hurting during that Smackdown title reign, and perhaps that's partly why he only held the belt for two months before Mysterio won it in storybook style at WrestleMania 22. Too bad for Rey-Rey that not every storybook ends with the words, "And he lived happily ever after." Mysterio lived happily for less than three months before Booker ascended to the Smackdown throne.

Since then? The curse struck again. Mysterio went on the disabled list with a knee injury.

Booker's plight? Not so good

since his back problems flared up not long after he dropped the title back to Batista. Perhaps it's time for this monarch to start talking retirement again.

At least Batista is healthy again, something that obviously can't be said for the "Dead Man," whose career probably won't be resurrected until late this year or early in 2008. A torn biceps will do that.

Which takes us to the beginning of the summer of 2007 and Edge, "Money In The Bank," and a great plan. It's hard to blame the cagey Edge for persuading an injured Ken Kennedy to compete for Kennedy's MITB title shot. Then the "Rated R Superstar" seized the opportunity of a sure title win when a hurting Smackdown World champion, 'Taker, was weakened following a cage match with Batista. He managed to work out a perfect plan that enabled him to walk out of Pittsburgh's Mellon Arena on May 8 as the new champion.

Edge's capture of the Smackdown World title was opportunism at its finest, and it was brilliant, provided that the "Rated R Superstar" doesn't believe in curses.

Or trends, as he has become part of one. Remember, before reigning champion John Cena, Edge was the last World champion of Raw. Although Edge reigned only for two brief periods, the Raw brand made him the main-eventer that he is today. He is correct when he points out that ratings for Raw got a noticeable spike when he got his hands on the gold. There are many who continue to insist WWE would have been better off had Edge kept the belt longer and that he is the company's most talented all-around star right now. Not easy to argue against that.

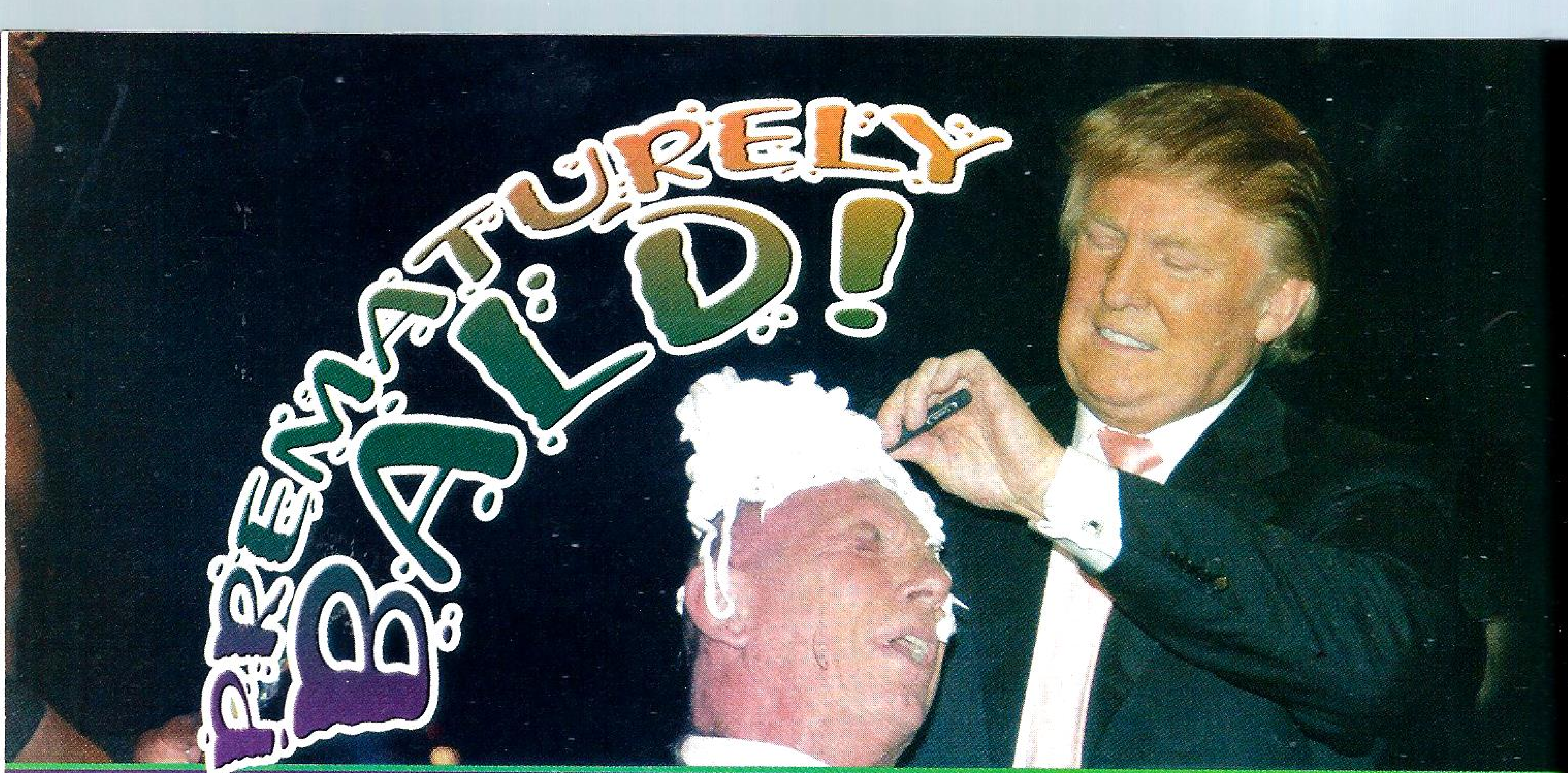
A little Raw history lesson shows us that other recent Raw champions include Cena, of course, Rob Van Dam, Triple-H, Batista, Randy Orton, Chris Benoit, and Shawn Michaels. Cena's star has skyrocketed since he took over as Raw's torchbearer (not coincidentally after a so-so run atop Smackdown). Triple-H, who was recovering from a torn quadriceps at press time, defined himself as a megastar through his dominance of the Raw title picture. Batista was at his best as Raw champion and might never reach the same heights again. And Chris Benoit enjoyed a very solid five-month reign with the Raw title and has been among WWE's most respected stars ever since.

Only RVD and Orton don't seem to belong on the list of stars who got an enormous boost from holding Raw's World title, and their struggles, it could be argued, have been mostly their own fault.

Edge likes to think of himself as a trendsetter. Now he has a chance to end one ominous trend and curse a curse. For the first time in a long time perhaps, we

With all the risks associated with a Smackdown World title reign, Edge might want to reconsider defending the belt. Hopefully, he isn't superstitious.

PREMATURELY BALD!

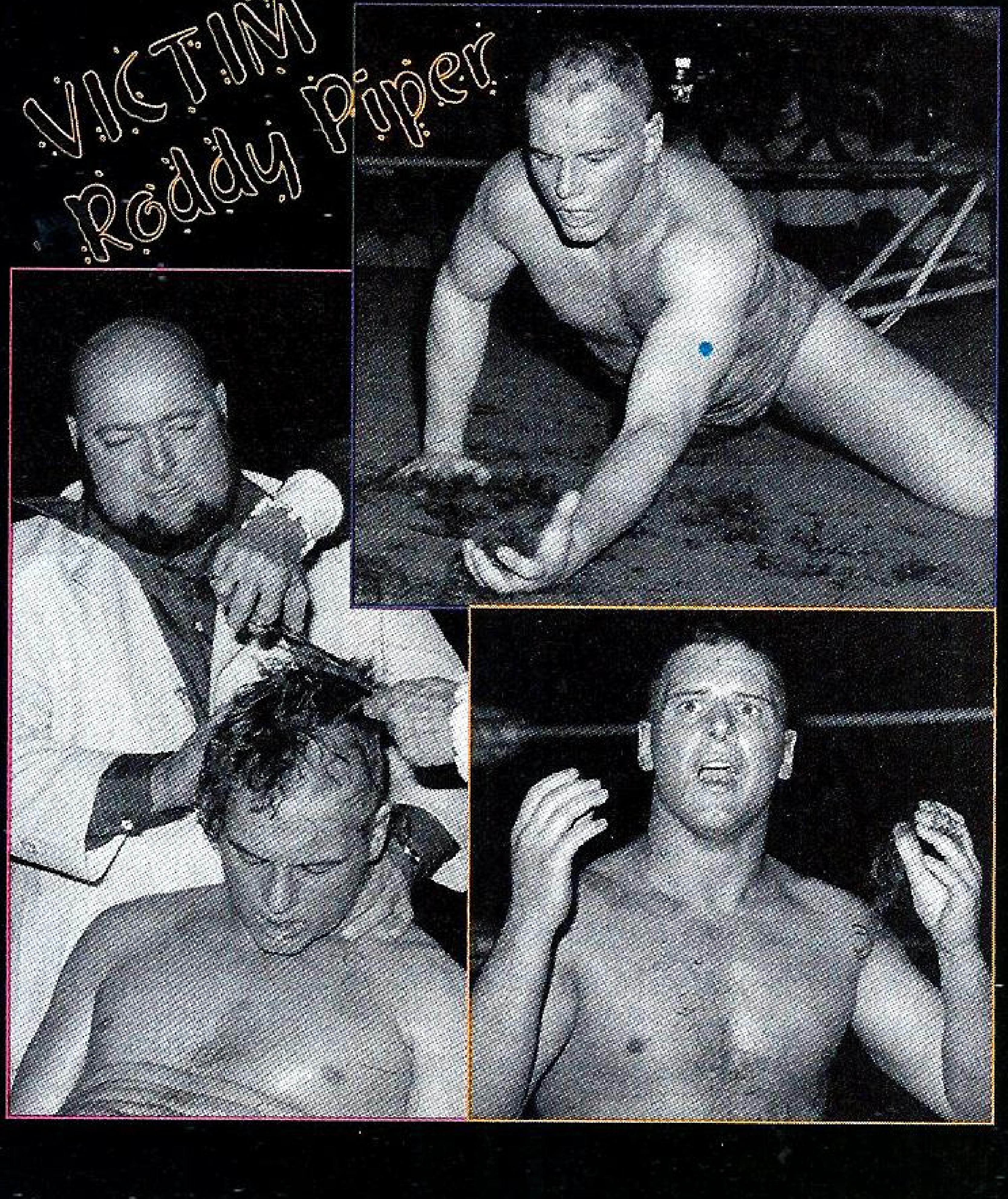


VINCE Is Just Another Member Of Wrestling's Hair Club For LOSERS

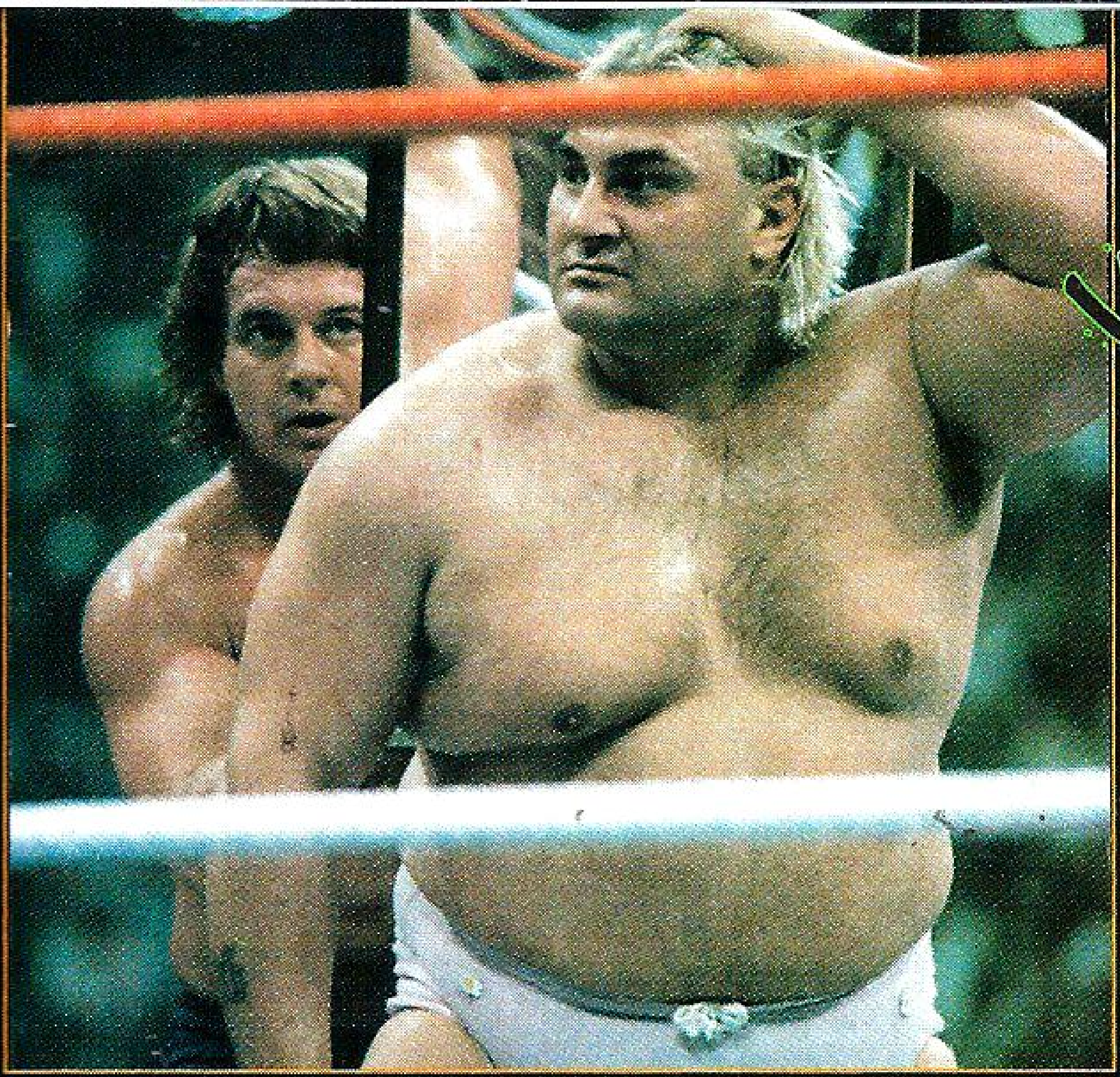
It's been said that the cage match is the ultimate conclusion to a long-standing wrestling feud. We don't happen to agree. The hair match surpasses the cage match because it adds a unique psychological factor: The loser is not only defeated, he or she is humiliated. Ask Vince McMahon or any of the nine other hair victims featured in this photographic essay: They would all agree that they'd rather take a piledriver off the top rope than have to sit in the middle of an arena packed with fans and get their heads shaved bald.

As innovative as Vince is, he's not reluctant to revert to the tried-and-true formulas that have made wrestling the great sport it has been for so many years. The cage match has become somewhat ordinary, but the hair match has always been special—and always will be.

Join us as we journey back through time to relive just a few of them.



The "Rowdy Scot" is out cold as he gets his hair cut by ring announcer Jimmy Lennon Sr. and Butcher Vachon after his loss to Chavo Guerrero Sr. in Los Angeles in 1976. He awakens to the shocking reality of the situation, and then scrambles to recover what is already a lost cause. Was he thinking about weaving the hairs together and making a toupe?

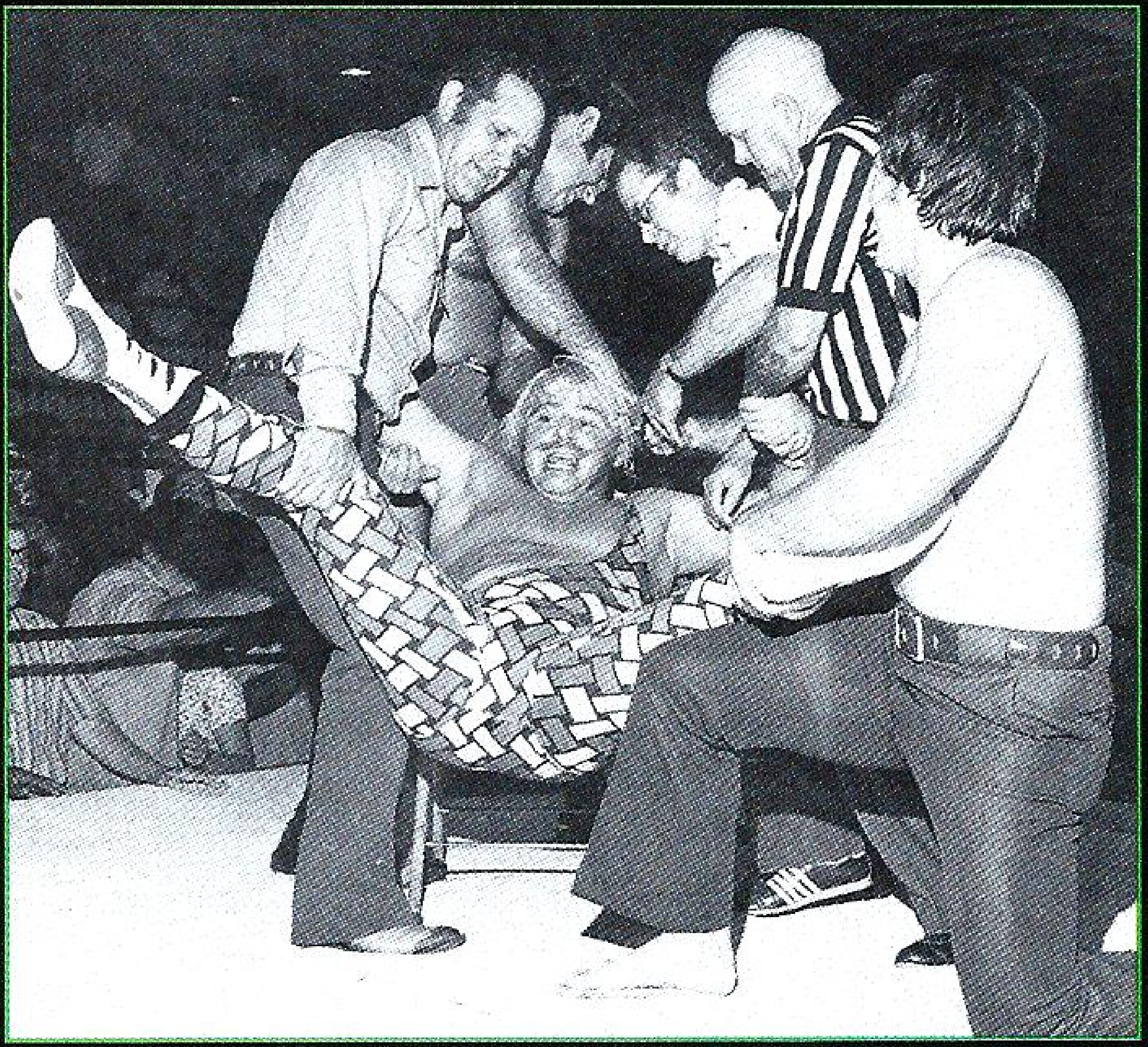


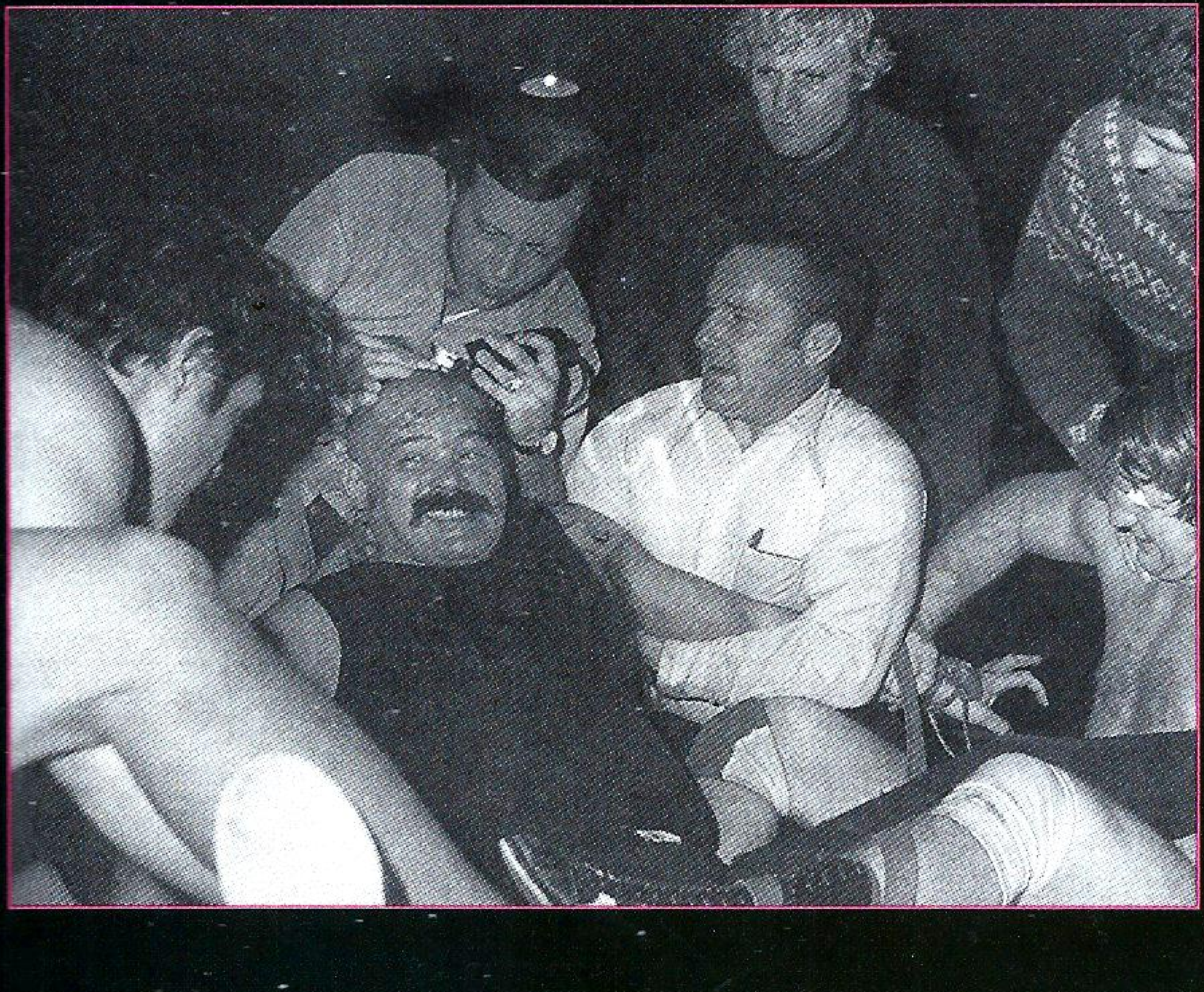
VICTIM Adrian Adonis

Eleven years after suffering his own moment of embarrassment, Roddy Piper has little empathy for Adrian Adonis after beating him at WrestleMania III. Apparently, though, Brutus Beefcake, who did the barbering, let the "Adorable One" off easy. Hopefully, he was rewarded with a nice tip.

VICTIM Bobby Shane

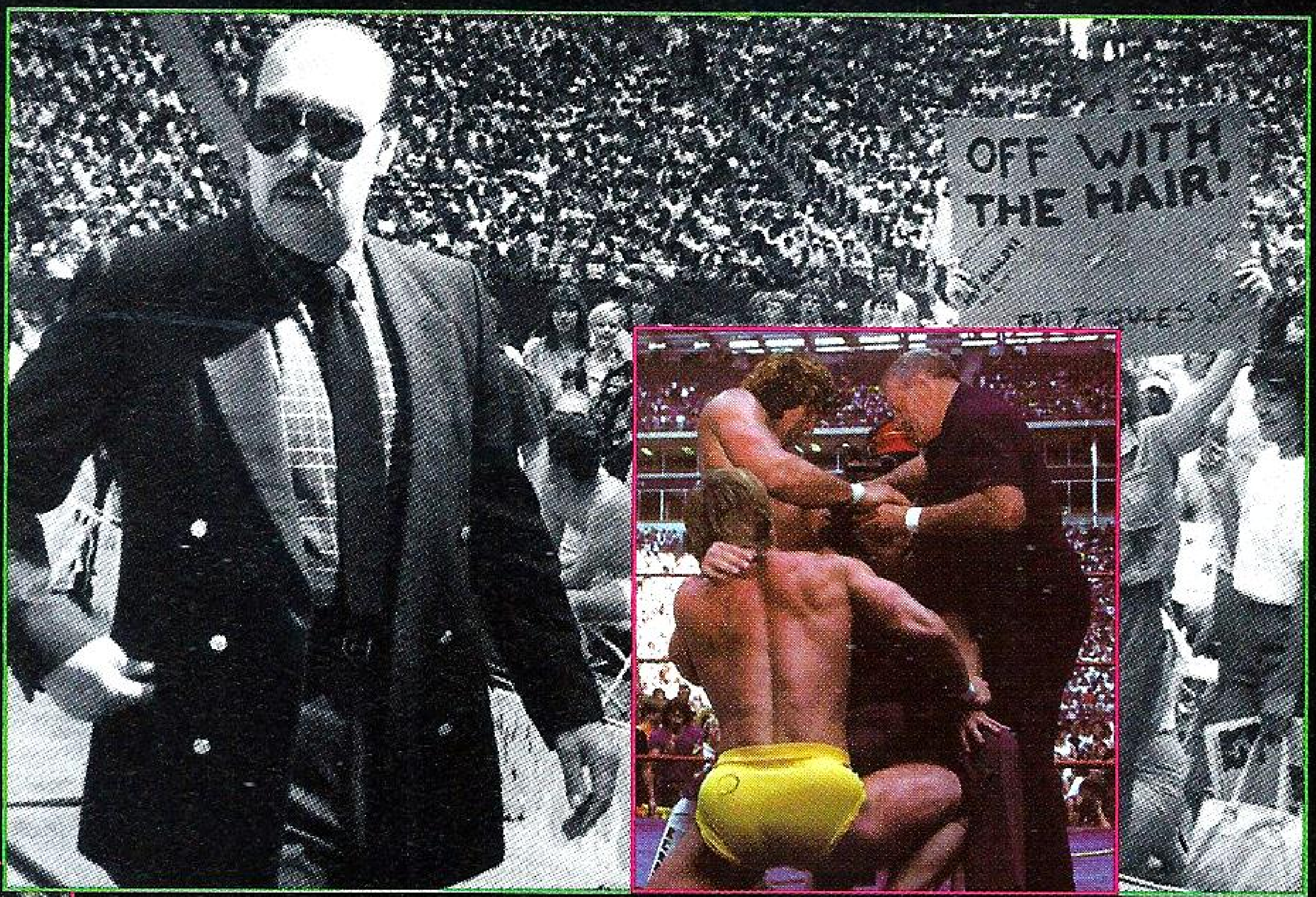
How did Shane even think he'd stand a stand a chance against one of North Carolina's most popular stars, Johnny Weaver, back in 1974? If he had any thoughts of reneging on the deal, Weaver had Nelson Royal (left), Scott Casey (kneeling), and referee Paul Morton to make sure he didn't escape.





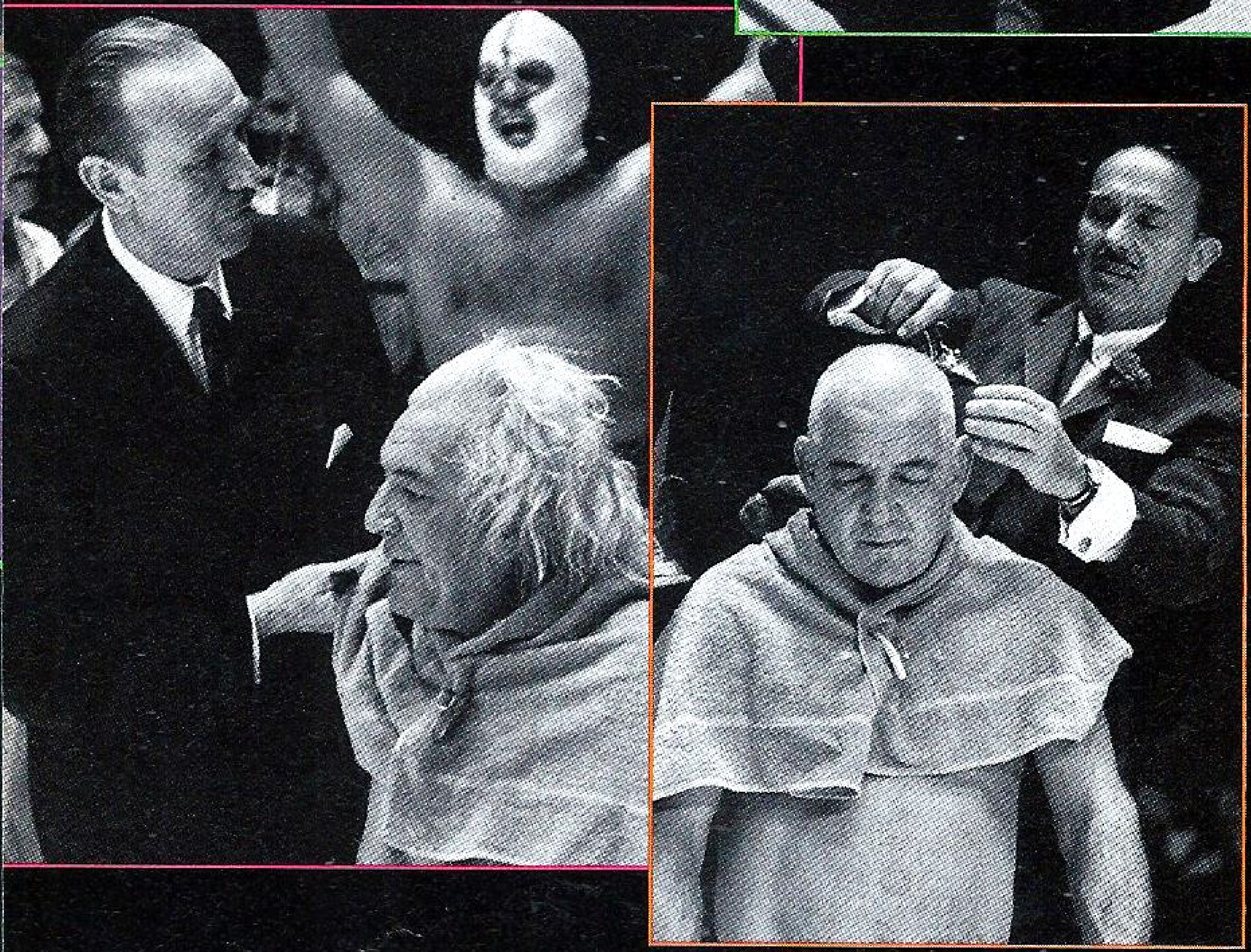
VICTIM Apache Gringo

It got downright ugly in Amarillo, Texas, in 1972 when Suni War Cloud and Apache Gringo started to hurl accusations that the other was not a full-blooded Native American. Promoter Nick Kozak, fearing the worst possible outcome to this war of words, convinced both men to agree to an "Indian Scalp Match." After winning, War Cloud was pretty nice about the whole thing—he allowed Gringo to keep his moustache.


OFF WITH THE HAIR!

VICTIM Gary Hart

Truthfully, neither Hart nor Fritz Von Erich had much to lose at this stage of their lives in 1985, but the fans got what they wished for, and Hart has chosen to remain clean-shaven ever since.

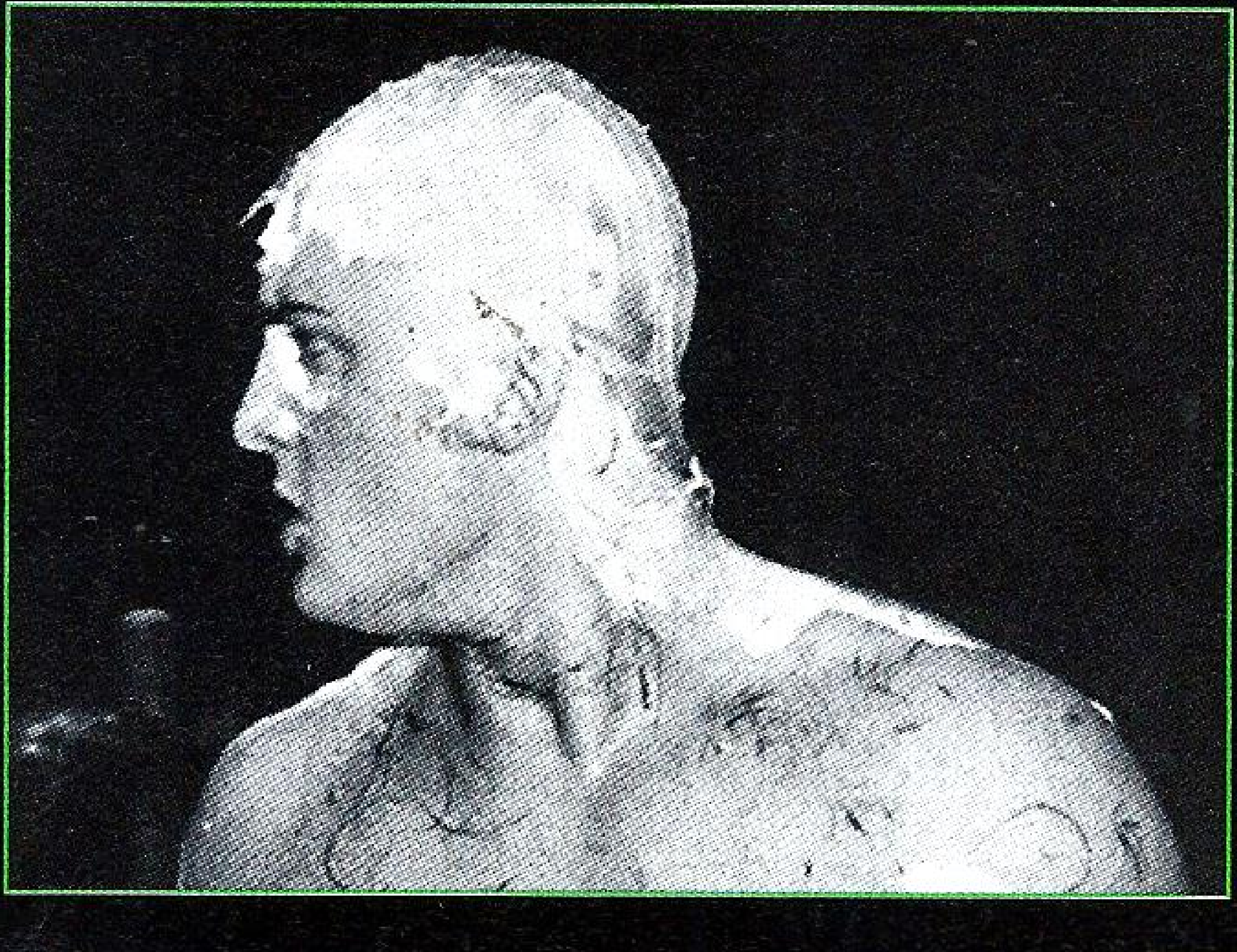


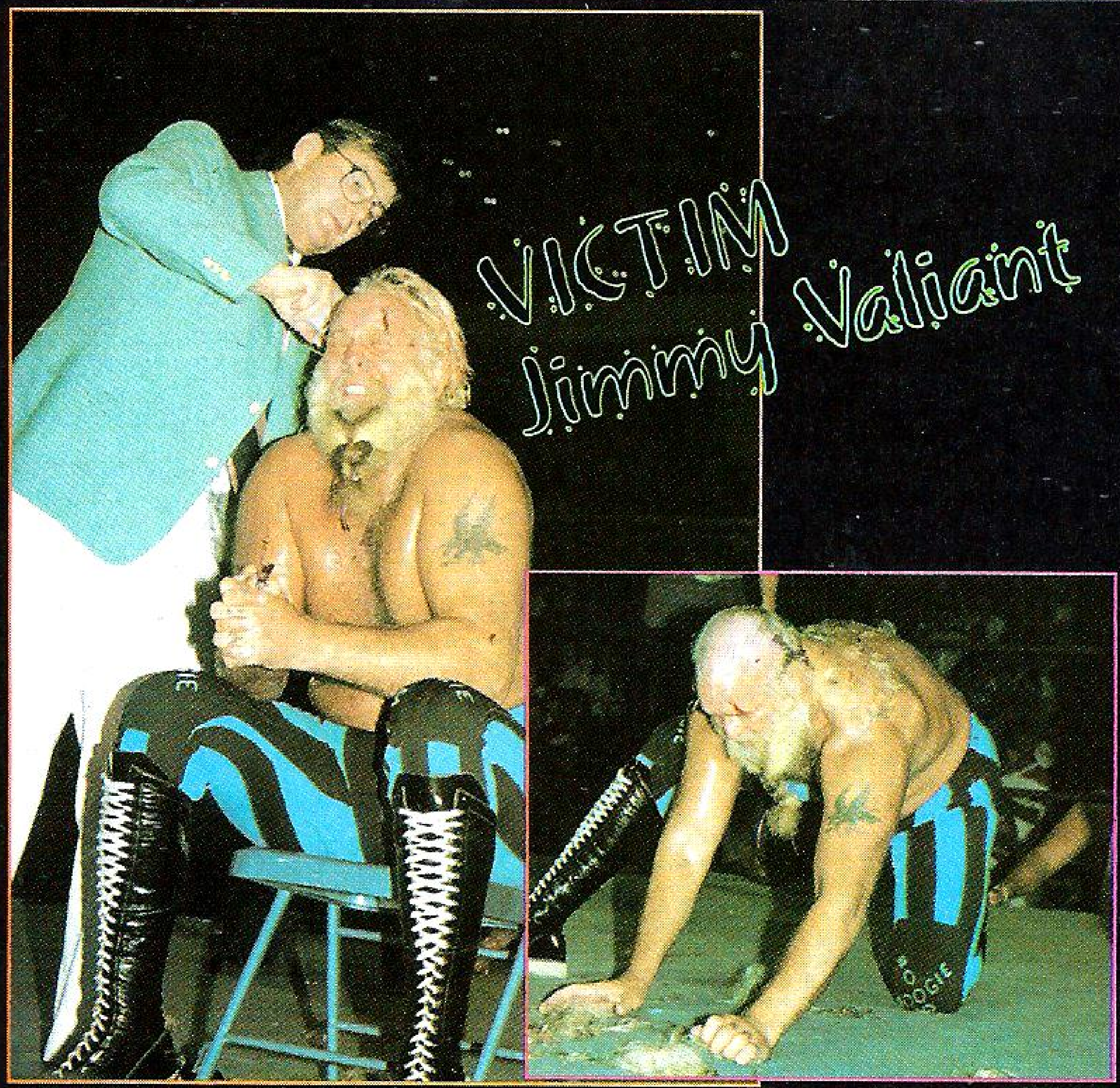
VICTIM Gorgeous George

With all due respect to Mr. McBaldy-Beany, this was the cut that was heard 'round the world. When Gorgeous George risked his famous blond locks against The Destroyer's mask in Los Angeles, we all knew that either George was extremely confident or, by 1962, his career was just about over and he didn't feel there was much to lose. When he did lose, he morosely sat on a stool and let the barber have his way with him. It was a sad moment for George, but not The Destroyer.

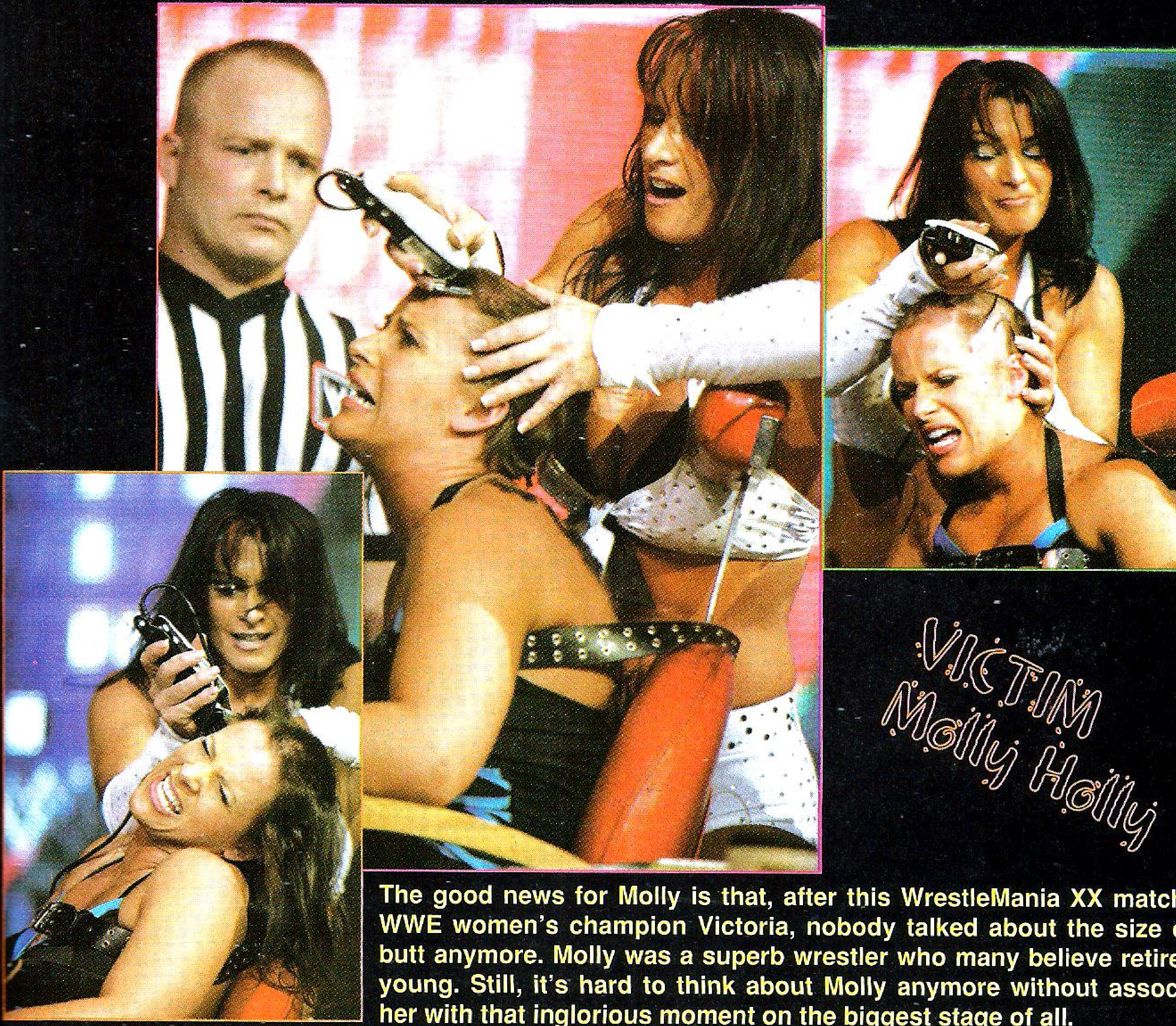
VICTIM Gino Hernandez

But it could easily have been Jose Lothario, save for the keen eye of a ringside official who noticed that Lothario's leg was on the rope when Hernandez scored the pinfall in this 1978 match in Houston, Texas. Lothario's head was already lathered up and he was ready to accept the injustice like a man, when the official intervened. The match resumed and Hernandez was pinned ... right in the middle of the ring.





The 14-city Great American Bash tour of 1986 drew 150,000 fans and total gate receipts of about $4-million. The cards featured some of the most memorable bouts in NWA history, including Magnum T.A.'s best-of-seven series with Nikita Koloff and Dusty Rhodes' cage match victory over Ric Flair for the World title in Greensboro, North Carolina. But what many fans came to see was the series of hair matches involving Valiant and members of Paul Jones' Army. After humbling Shaska Whatley at Bash #4 in Charlotte, Valiant concentrated his efforts on Jones himself at Bash #13 in Greensboro. Jones, who ordinarily wouldn't have stood a chance against the wily veteran, received outside assistance from Whatley and Baron Von Raschke to win the match. And despite the protestations of Valiant's buddy, Manny Fernandez, the "Boogie-Woogie Man" calmly allowed NWA official Sandy Scott to shave him bald.



The good news for Molly is that, after this WrestleMania XX match with WWE women's champion Victoria, nobody talked about the size of her butt anymore. Molly was a superb wrestler who many believe retired too young. Still, it's hard to think about Molly anymore without associating her with that inglorious moment on the biggest stage of all.

John Cena

"I'm the hardest-working guy in WWE"

SINCE JUMPING TO RAW from Smackdown in 2005, John Cena has faced mixed audience reactions. Few wrestlers in the history of the sport have divided audience loyalty so decisively as the "Chain Gang" soldier. No matter if fans love him or hate him, one thing has become clear: John Cena is the face of WWE in the 21st century. He's a multi-time world champion and is carving out a solid legacy for himself.

Ever since he regained the Raw World championship in the fall of 2006, Cena has taken on all comers and proven time and time again that he belongs in the main-event picture of WWE. Often criticized for what many analysts and fans view as a limited skill set in the ring, "The Champ" is quick to remind fans that legends such as Hulk Hogan and The Rock didn't have the arsenal of a Lou Thesz or Bret Hart.

John Cena was first noticed in 2003 when he came to WWE after a tremendously successful run in Ohio Valley Wrestling. With his throwback jerseys and rap promos, Cena garnered the attention of wrestling fans worldwide. And though that attention was an even mix of positive and negative reactions, the "Chain Gang" was born and a meteoric rise to the top of WWE began.

The "Doctor Of Thuganomics" is certainly outspoken, yet takes pride in his blunt honesty. Sometimes this bluntness can create trouble with potential opponents, but he just tells it like it is, whatever the consequences.

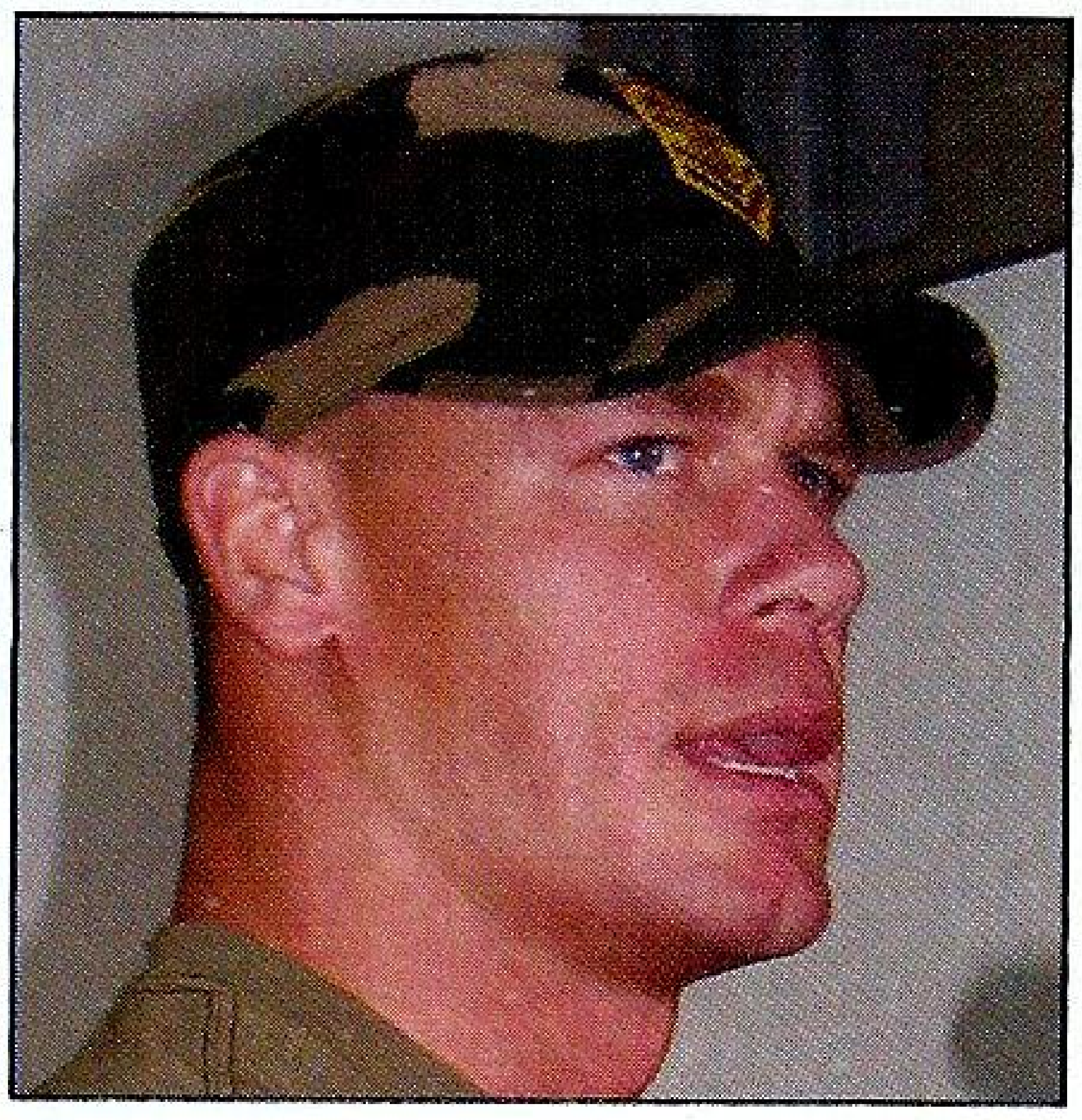


Photo courtesy of USA Network

> **"I don't think I really belong in Hollywood as much as I do WWE. It's a nice place to visit, and I've had some good success there, but I'm the top gun in WWE. Why would I give that up?"**

Despite some success crossing over into movies and television, Cena seems content to stay in WWE. Unlike many of his contemporaries who used wrestling as a springboard to mainstream careers, Cena's love for wrestling is too strong, even if some of the fans don't love him as much.

Shortly after his pinfall victory over The Great Khali at One Night Stand, John Cena sat down with INSIDE WRESTLING *Contributing Writer Jake Black to talk about a wide range of subjects, including the falls-count-anywhere match, putting spinners on championship belts, and The Undertaker's WrestleMania streak.*

Q: John, thanks for taking the time out of your busy schedule to talk with me. It's been a pretty big year for you already. How would you describe 2007 so far?

A: It's been a great year. WrestleMania was unreal. When you face someone like Shawn Michaels at the biggest show of the year, it's a pretty incredible feeling. Plus, I was able to beat him and keep my title. There've been so many highlights already that I'm just enjoying the ride. The thing about this business is anyone can beat his opponent on any given night. I've fought hard to get where I'm at, and to stay on top this year like I have has been great.

Q: Over the last 12 months or so, Hollywood has been a big part of your experience. You've been a movie star and wrestled celebrities, and now you are moving on to reality TV. Are you following in the footsteps of The Rock or Hulk Hogan and looking to move to Hollywood full-time?

A: (*Laughs*) There were more of those highlights this year. Giving the FU to Kevin Federline was a hell of a way to kick-start my year. I loved shooting *The Marine*, and, yeah, I'm doing a reality show about fast cars now. But I don't know if a full-time move to Hollywood is in my future. I beat K-Fed's ass because he was an invader in the WWE world—my

JOHN CENA
CHAIN-GANG SOLDIER
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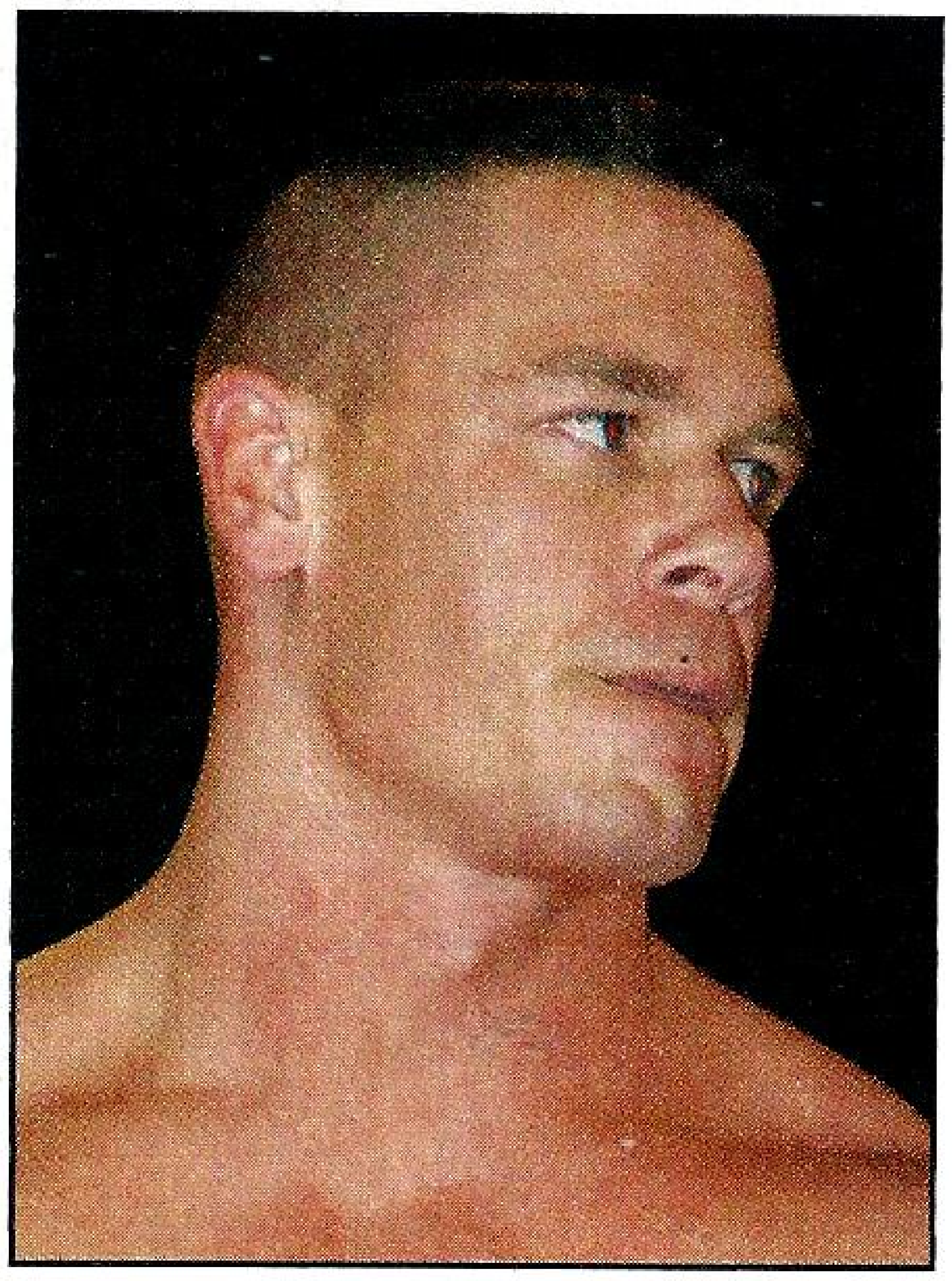
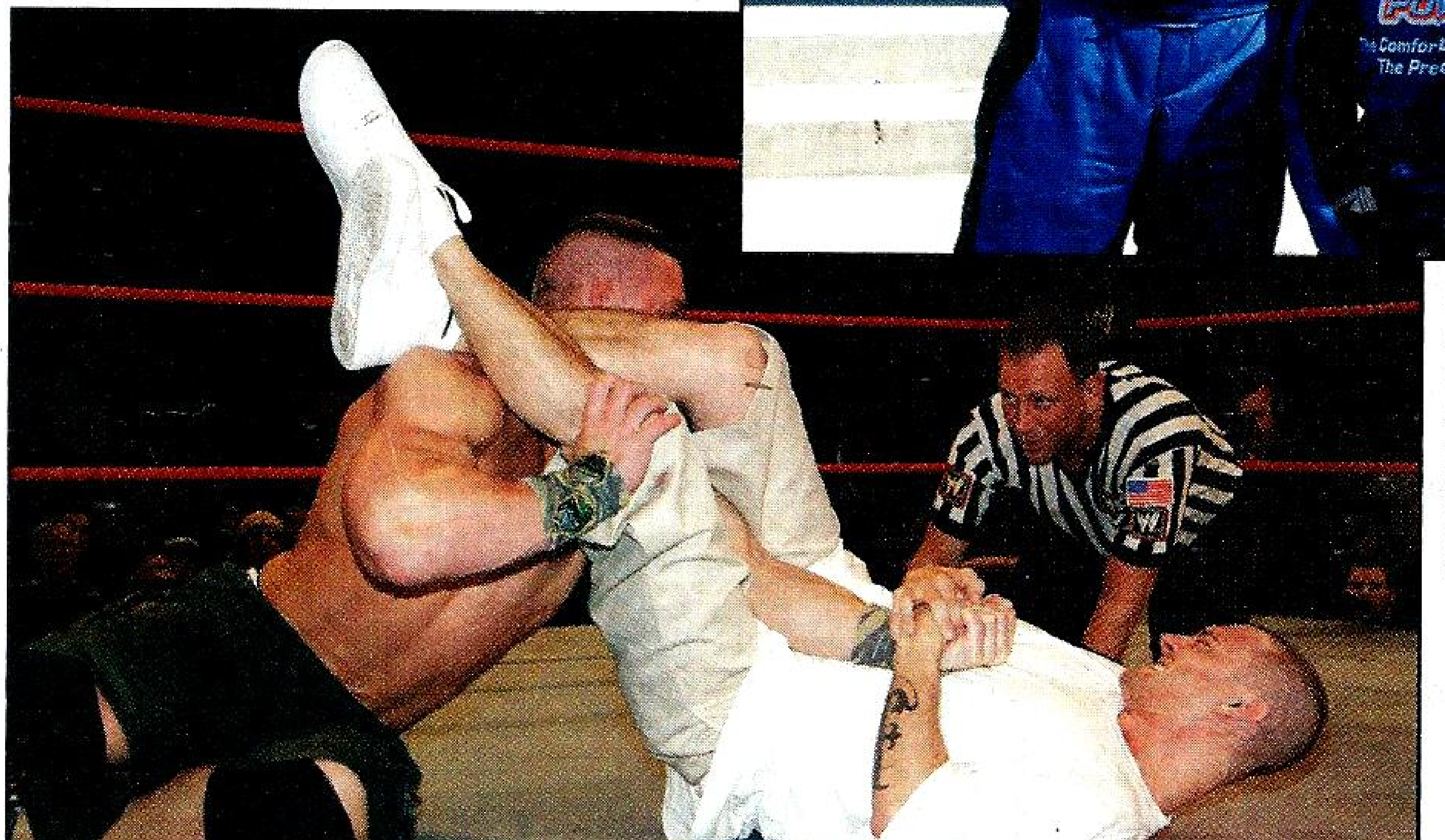
Photo courtesy of USA Network



"I've gone out to the ring night in and night out and busted my hump to prove that I deserve to be where I am. I've worked my way to the top and fought to stay there."



world—and he didn't belong there. I don't think I really belong in Hollywood as much as I do WWE. It's a nice place to visit, and I've had some good success there, but I'm the top gun in WWE. Why would I give that up?

Q: You have held the Raw World championship for close to a year, and beaten giants like The Great Khali and legends like Triple-H in the process. What do have to say to your nay-sayers out there?

A: Yeah, I know a lot of people are hating on me, but like you said, I've held belt for a year. I had it for most of the year before, too, before Edge and RVD took short turns with it. I've gone out to the ring night in and night out and busted my hump to prove that I deserve to be where I am. I've worked my way to the top and fought to stay there. Fans may not like me or think I don't wrestle or whatever, but the fact is I'm the hardest-working guy in WWE. You can see me. Like I say on TV every week, "The champ is here!" And I'm staying here!

Q: With WWE's announcement that it would be combining talent from Raw, Smackdown, and ECW on all pay-per-view events, how do you feel about the increase of potential contenders for your championship coming from beyond the Raw roster?

A: It doesn't matter. My title is the most sought-after title in all of wrestling. If you can win that one, you're the best in the business. I've won it and kept it. I've fought all the challengers that have come my way so far, and I'm going to keep doing that. It doesn't matter if they're from Raw, Smackdown, or ECW. I'll beat them all! This is my belt. No one can take it from me.

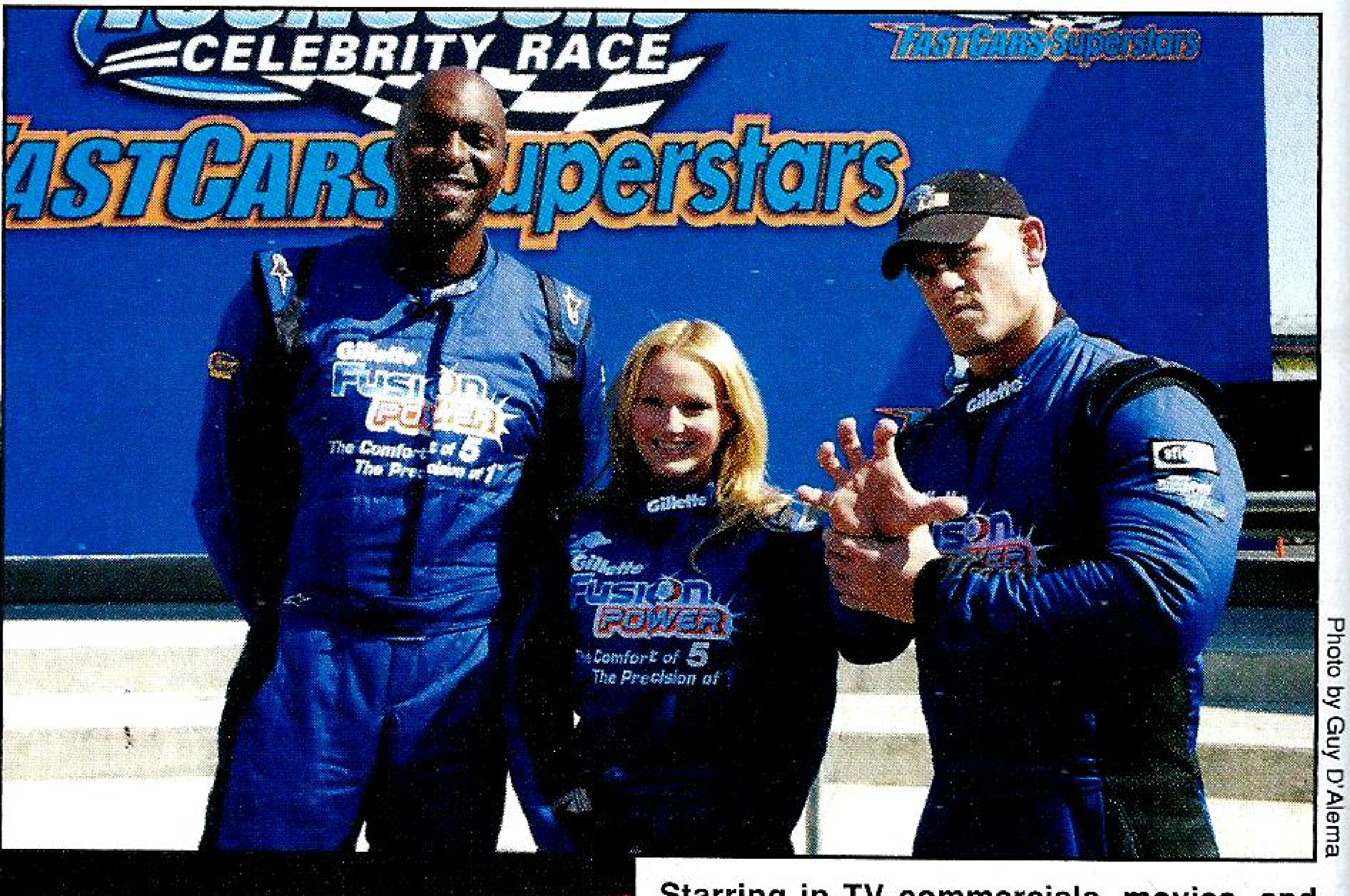
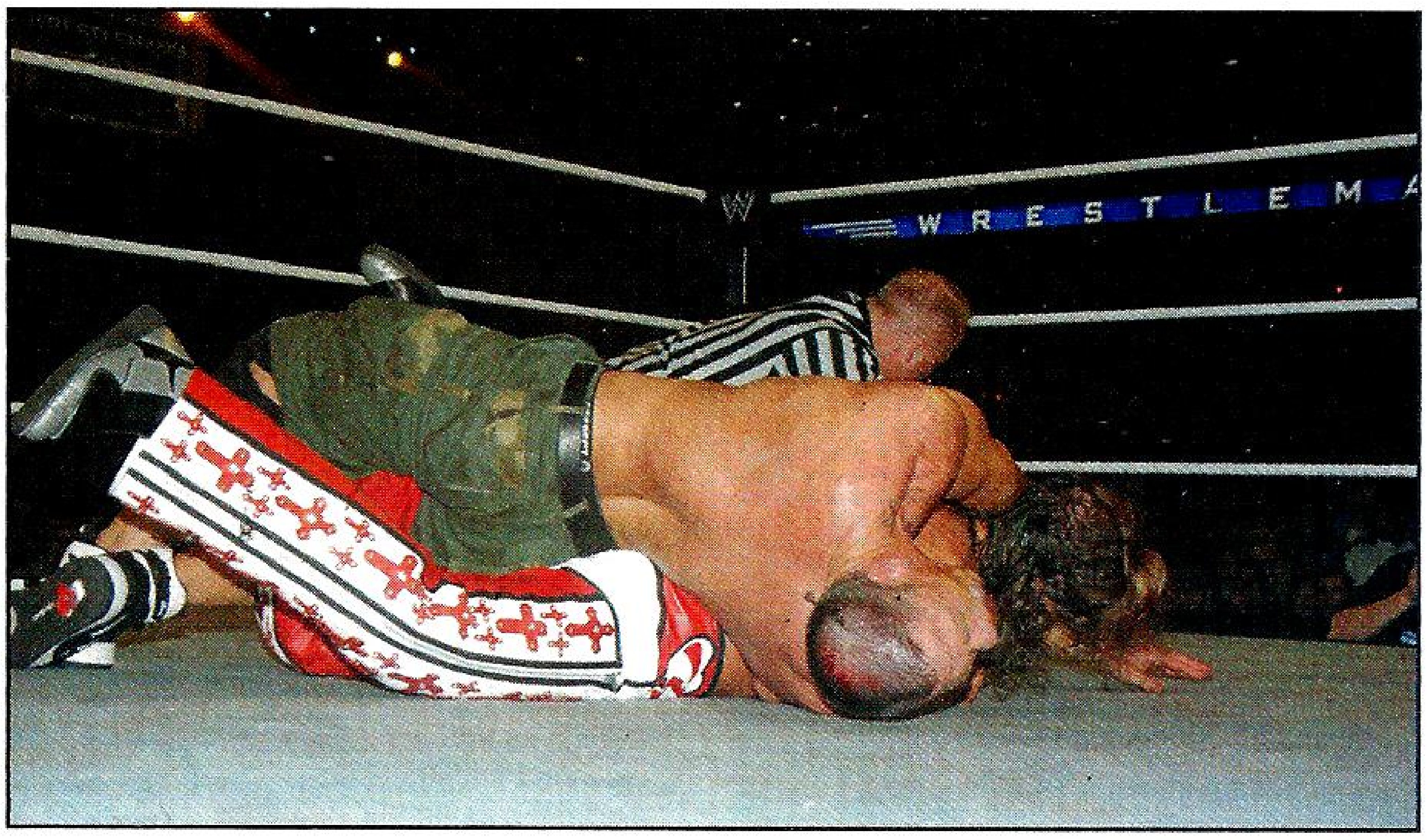


Photo by Guy D'Alema

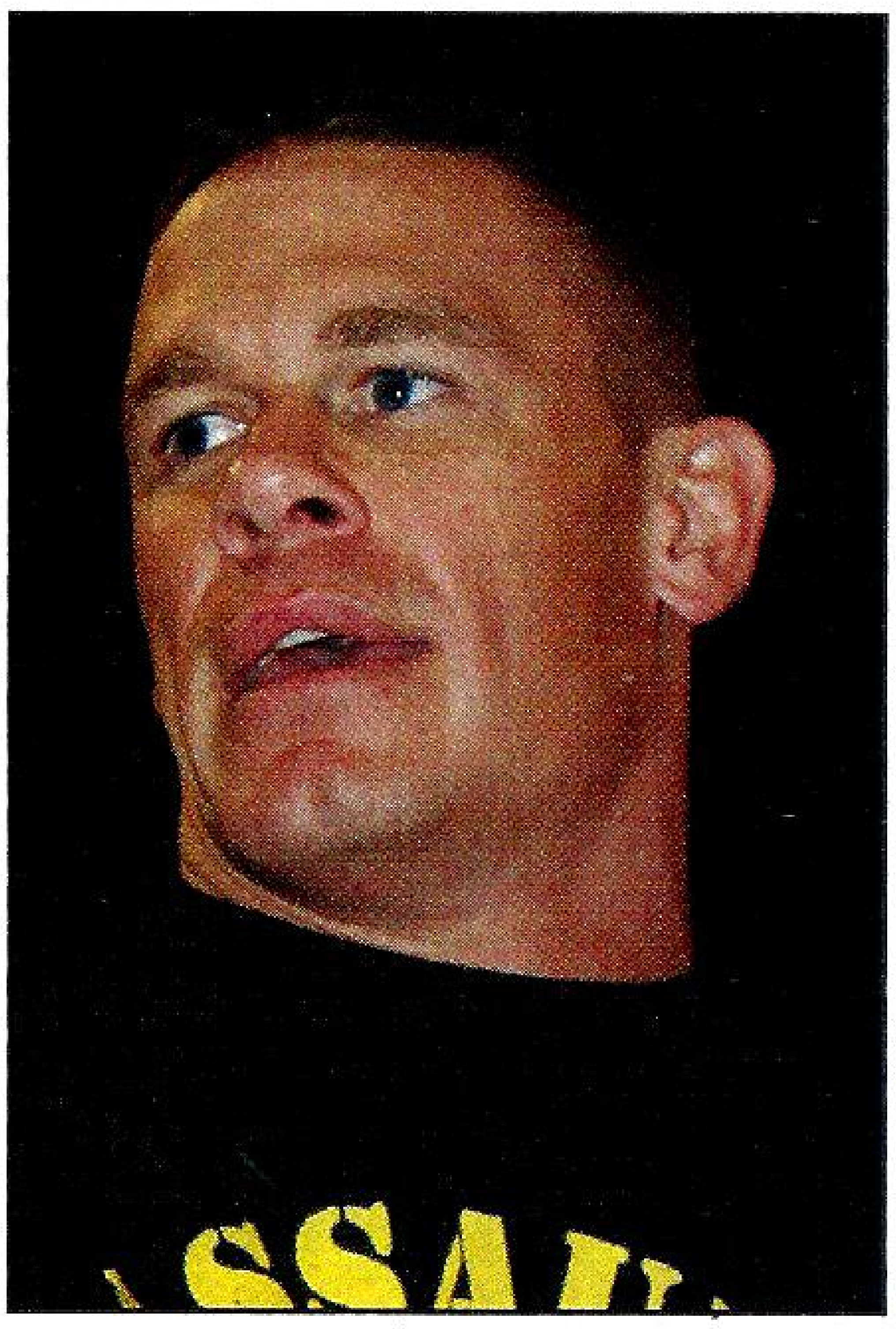
Starring in TV commercials, movies, and now reality TV, John Cena may enjoy hobnobbing with celebrities like NBA star John Salley and singer Jewel (above). But Cena is no hypocrite. Just as he showed Kevin Federline that he doesn't belong in WWE (left), the "Doctor Of Thuganomics" knows that his home is in the squared circle.

Q: Who would you like to face from the current WWE talent pool?

A: Like I said, I'll beat anyone who comes my way. There are guys who I think I could have a good match with. Guys like Bobby Lashley or Undertaker would be fun to face. I don't feel like I really need to prove anything to anyone, but beating The Undertaker would be an exclamation point on my career. Maybe I'll end his 'Mania streak next year. You never know (*laughs*). I mean, I ended Khali's undefeated streak. I can beat 'Taker, too.

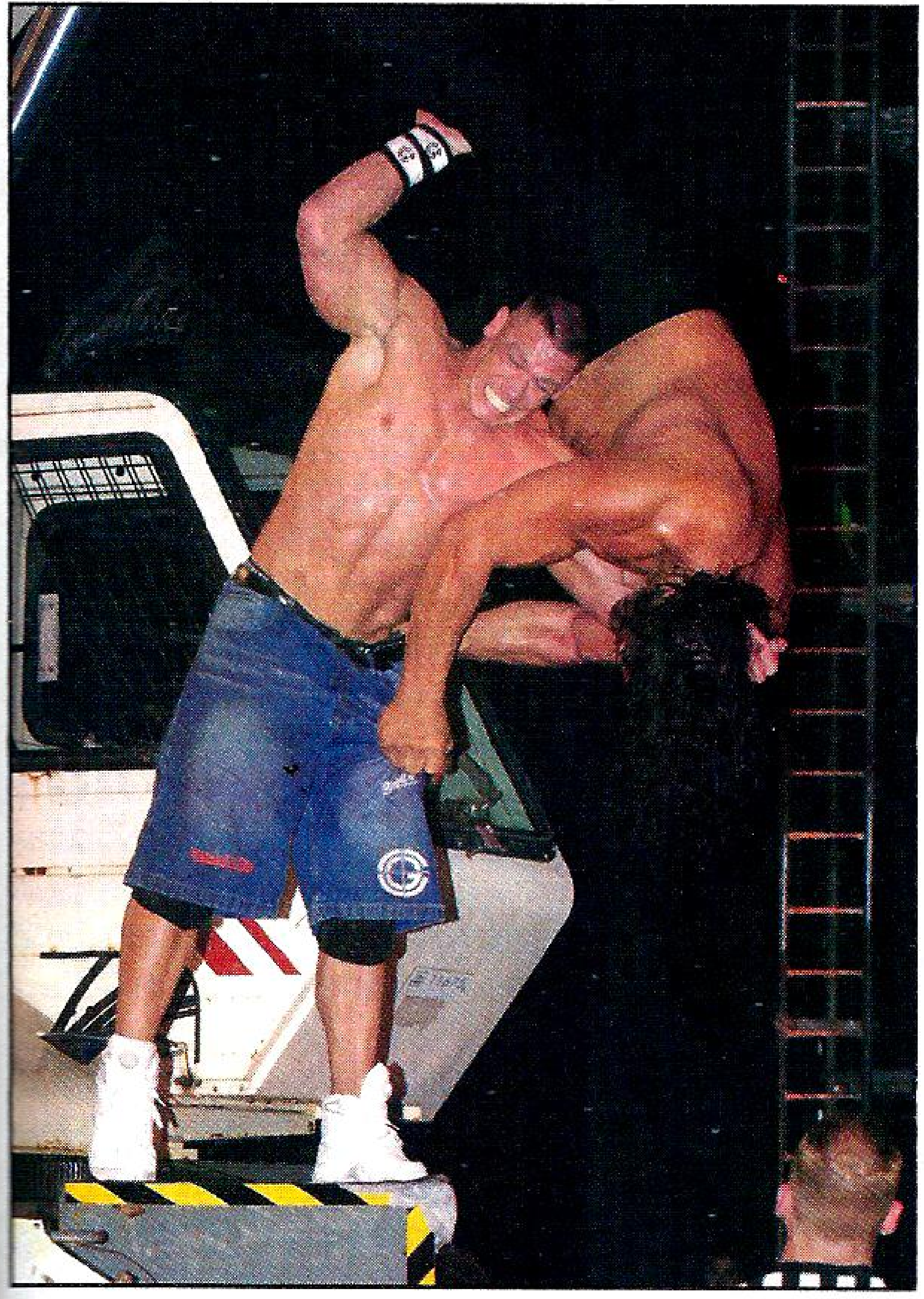


Cena has been lucky enough to compete against—and defeat—some of WWE's biggest legends, including Shawn Michaels at this year's WrestleMania. But the champ is never fully satisfied. He already has his eye on The Undertaker for WM24, with hopes of ending the "Dead Man's" 'Mania winning streak.



Q: After winning your titles in WWE, you had the belts changed to include "spinners." Do you think that hurts the history or legacy of the belts?

A: Don't be dissin' the spinner, man (*laughs*)! Actually, I don't think they discredit the belt's history. You look back over the years, all the big champions have made their mark on belts. Tazz had the FTW belt, Austin had a flaming skull, The Ultimate Warrior had a different colored strap for every match, and Hogan even tagged the WCW belt with NWO spray paint. That's insulting the belt, I think. Leaving my mark is actually part of the legacy, not hurting it.



Maintaining a dominant reign as Raw World champion is a hefty challenge, but an even heftier challenge was lifting The Great Khali over his head for an FU off of a crane at One Night Stand in June.

Q: One of the most memorable moments in your career took place at 2006's ECW One Night Stand where you got a very negative fan reaction from the ECW faithful. What are your memories of that night?

A: You mean besides Edge spearing me through a table? I knew the fans were not going to be happy to see me. But I don't have time to worry about boos or whatever. People are going to like who they want to like and hate who they want to hate. I'm not going to waste time worrying too much about it. I don't have time to.

> ***"It's like people used to say, it's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog. Ain't no one got more fight in them than me."***

Q: Tell us about your recent matches with The Great Khali. You admitted being scared of the monster, but also said you got over it. What scared you? How did you get over it?

A: The guy is freakin' huge! That's what scared me. He chokeslammed me through tables and on concrete. Wouldn't you be scared? But I realized, when I actually wrestled him one on one, that even though he's a giant and the biggest kid on the block these days, it's like people used to say: It's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog. Ain't no one got more fight in them than me.

Q: What does the future hold for John Cena?

A: I'm the champ, and I'm going to stay the champ. What does the future hold? Probably a bunch of guys coming for me—gunning for my title. They're always there. But I guess that means the future holds more wins on my record. ☐

editors' roundtable

Should The McMahons Have On-Air Roles?

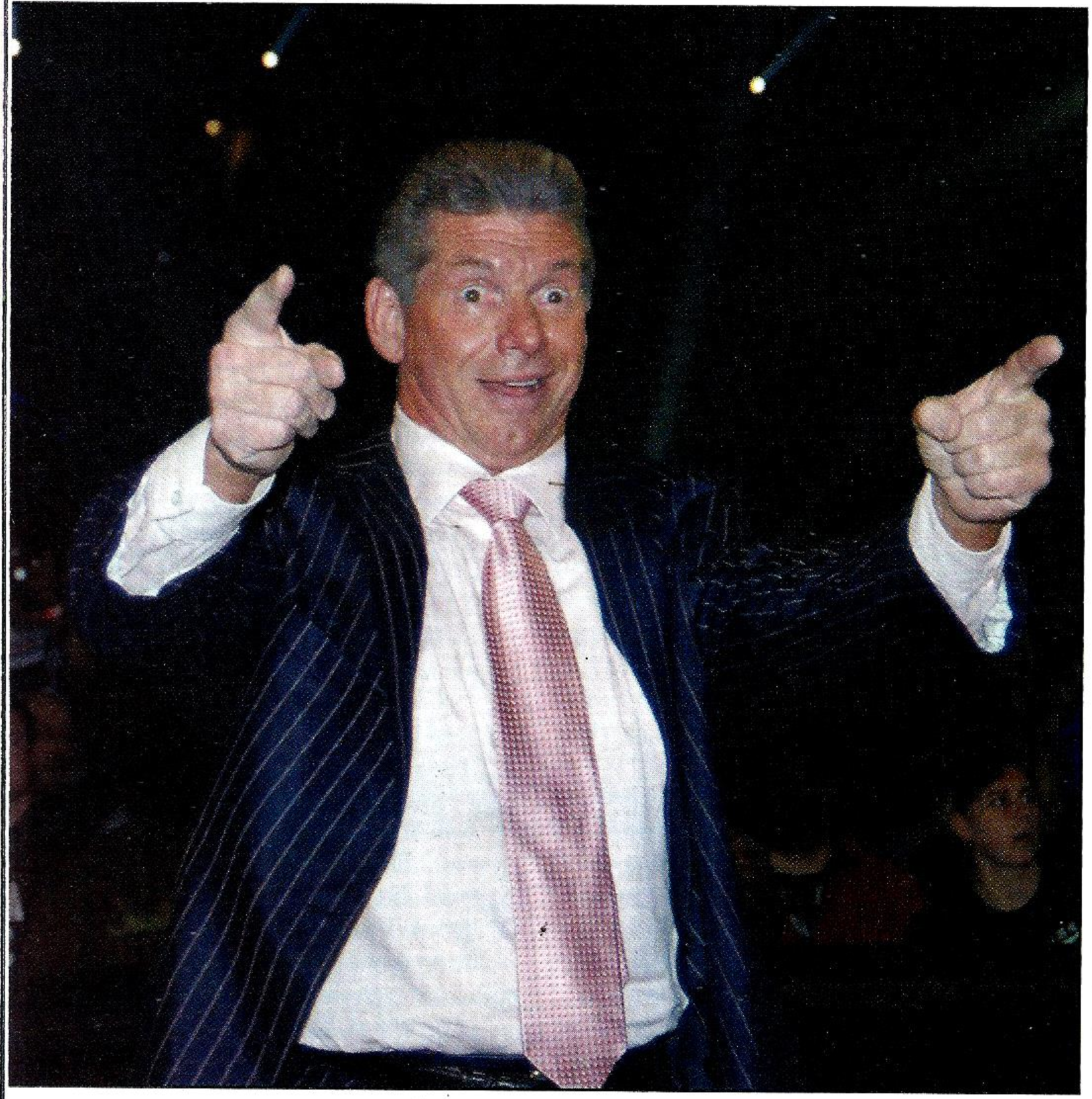
> **"It was a novelty at first to have the McMahons as such a vital part of the biggest angles on WWE programming, but now, after the same stuff for nearly 10 years, it just doesn't work anymore."**
> **—Frank Ingiosi**

FOR THE BETTER portion of a quarter century, a McMahon has been an integral, on-screen part of WWE programming. Whether it was Vince Jr.'s role as play-by-play man, Linda's semi-comatose state during her husband's infidelities, young Stephanie's orchestrated kidnapping, or Shane O'Mac leaping off of scaffolding, the entire McMahon clan has become as much a part of WWE television history as any wrestler.

But, for as many memorable moments the Stamfordians have brought to WWE television over the years, their constant presence has also been met with a great deal of criticism. For every angle in which Vince feuded with the reigning champion, there seemed to be a skit akin to the billionaire chairman performing an amateur colonoscopy on a mock-up of Jim Ross. In short, the McMahons' on-air involvement has usually resulted in spectacular success or spectacular failure.

For those fans who prefer televised wrestling that features more in-ring action and less backstage drama, the past few years have been difficult. However, the ratings prove that, by and large, people continue to tune in to WWE programming in large numbers.

Following the Mr. McMahon death angle on Raw, Publisher Stu Saks gathered Editor-in-Chief Harry Burkett, Contributing Editor Dave Lenker, and Senior Writer Frank Ingiosi to discuss the McMahon family dominance of WWE programming with the hopes of settling this oft-argued debate once and for all.



Unlike wife Linda, who focuses on work behind the scenes and is rarely seen on WWE programming, it seems that Vince McMahon constantly yearns to be in the spotlight. Some might criticize him for it, but, more often than not, Vince's appearances are crowd-pleasers ... especially when he's getting blown up.

STU SAKS: Gentlemen, I know this will soon take on all the feeling of the Bill Murray movie *Groundhog Day*, but I'd like to gauge your feelings on the omnipresence of the McMahon family on WWE programming over,

The McMahon family's involvement in WWE storylines seems questionable to even Stephanie McMahon, who followed the example of her mother, Linda, and opted out of regular onscreen roles for quite some time ... until her father's demise.

say, the past decade. This is traditionally as divisive a topic as any, so let's start with the voice of reason: Dave, what are your thoughts?

DAVE LENKER: Well, Stu, thanks for the vote of confidence. I believe that, taken in moderation, the involvement of the McMahons provide an obvious place for the fans to focus their discontent. When a wrestler needs a boost in popularity, there's nothing better than having him square off against the boss.

FRANK INGIOSI: I see your point, Dave, but I really have to disagree strongly. It was a novelty at first to have the McMahons as such a vital part of the biggest angles on WWE programming, but now, after the same stuff for nearly 10 years, it just doesn't work anymore.

SAKS: Frank brings up a good point, although I don't want to lose sight of what Dave said, either. Harry, where do you stand on the McMahon-ization of WWE programming?

HARRY BURKETT: I think I would have to say that it's been a little bit of both Dave and Frank's points. In the '90s, during the "Stone-Cold" Steve Austin era, one could argue that WWE would've never taken off the way it did without the involvement of the McMahons. And fans still react each and every time a McMahon is featured, and that can't be ignored.

LENKER: That's true, Harry. The success of wrestling events—both when attending live and watching at home—is based largely on the type of reaction the show causes among the fan base. Love them or hate them, fans still react like crazy each time a McMahon is part of the card. You can't deny reactions like those.

INGIOSI: Yes, but lately, it seems like the reaction has been more of a collective groan than anything else. Think back to late spring when Vince and Shane were part of two of the biggest angles WWE had all year—the "Battle Of The Billionaires" at WrestleMania 23 and the ensuing feud with Bobby Lashley. While neither angle should have stolen the show based on their situations, both were given top billing solely because of the McMahons' involvement. And, of course, the latest situation is Vince getting blown up in his limousine. Some people are calling that the ultimate angle because, after all, a main character has never been killed off before.

SAKS: But not too many people expect Vince to stay dead.

INGIOSI: True, but that just proves my point. Even when Vince takes himself off of TV completely, he still finds a way to keep

Shane McMahon is always willing to step forward to aid his aging father in tough matches, even helping Vince win the ECW title at Backlash. The win might have angered some ECW fans, but the TV rating went up from 1.4 to 1.6 on the May 1 episode of ECW following the pay-per-view.

himself at the center of the storylines. If Creative was going to do this angle—and I'll admit that it would take guts—why not kill off John Cena, Edge, or King Booker?

SAKS: Okay, now this is getting morbid, Frank. I thought you were going to say something about WWE already killing off ECW. Seriously, though, is this angle in bad taste?

BURKETT: I don't think so. Prime-time television on any network is going to be just as violent any day of the week. There were about 40 scenes just like it in *The Marine*. Now, I'm not suggesting this is a good angle, because we don't know the endgame as of yet. As a traditionalist, I think the storyline goes too far beyond the realm of wrestling, but this kind of over-the-top angle is the McMahons' specialty.

SAKS: One could argue that the "Battle Of The Billionaires" was a more traditional angle, and it was great for cross-promotion and mainstream attention. In that case, you'd have to admit that the McMahon connection worked out for the best.

INGIOSI: For who? Frankly, the majority of fans don't care about the mainstream publicity WWE gets, good or bad. They just want to be entertained and shown two great athletes giving their all and maybe doing something amazing. There are only so many repeated gimmicks that fans are willing to accept, and it feels that, at times, that's all the McMahons have done.

BURKETT: I'm sure it doesn't help to bring up Vince McMahon's ECW title run, does it?

LENKER: Well, taken as a whole, that's a good example of the effectiveness of the McMahon family presence on TV.

SAKS: How so, Dave?

LENKER: Think about it: Who was talking about ECW before Vince, Shane, and Umaga separated Lashley from the gold? No one, unless they were criticizing the product for being inferior to the old ECW. After the title change, fans were at least tuning in to see the WWE chairman as ECW champion. Sure, it didn't endear him or ECW to the general viewing audience, but the fans definitely became intrigued.

INGIOSI: I think the biggest issue I have with the whole situation—including the ECW run—is that the more time the McMahons are on TV, the less time there is to develop younger talent for the future.

BURKETT: Frank's got a good point there, especially where ECW's concerned. With Rob Van Dam's departure, the inability of the Originals or the New Breed to really generate interest, the brand seems to be little more than the C.M. Punk show.

Shane McMahon is always willing to step forward to aid his aging father in tough matches, even helping Vince win the ECW title at Backlash. The win might have angered some ECW fans, but the TV rating went up from 1.4 to 1.6 on the May 1 episode of ECW following the pay-per-view.

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SAKS: How so, Dave?

LENKER: Think about it: Who was talking about ECW before Vince, Shane, and Umaga separated Lashley from the gold? No one, unless they were criticizing the product for being inferior to the old ECW. After the title change, fans were at least tuning in to see the WWE chairman as ECW champion. Sure, it didn't endear him or ECW to the general viewing audience, but the fans definitely became intrigued.

INGIOSI: I think the biggest issue I have with the whole situation—including the ECW run—is that the more time the McMahons are on TV, the less time there is to develop younger talent for the future.

BURKETT: Frank's got a good point there, especially where ECW's concerned. With Rob Van Dam's departure, the inability of the Originals or the New Breed to really generate interest, the brand seems to be little more than the C.M. Punk show.

"I think the point has to be raised that the McMahons have done so much to further the publicity of the sport through the years that, in some way, they've earned the right to be part of the show."

—Harry Burkett

SAKS: Similar to, say, baseball. Right, Harry? Fans would prefer to see young guys out there who may not win every night, but who you know are putting forth a complete effort rather than the same old team mailing it in.

BURKETT: Exactly, Stu. Plus, I think the point has to be raised that the McMahons have done so much to further the publicity of the sport through the years that, in some way, they've earned the right to be part of the show.

INGIOSI: As much as I'm not a fan of the amount of time devoted to the McMahon family on TV, I will agree with Harry's last point. We wouldn't even be having this discussion if it weren't for the overall creativity of the McMahons, so, in that respect, I agree. Still, I don't get that feeling when I watch yet another "Mr. McMahon Appreciation Night," even if the most recent one did end in the apparent demise of Mr. McMahon.

SAKS: I'm glad you brought that back up, Frank. Do you think killing off Vince's character was a way for the McMahons to step away from the camera?

INGIOSI: Not at all. If anything, this will just allow for a launching pad of more McMahon appearances: Shane consoling the McMahon women in the wake of Vince's passing, the widow Linda stepping up to take over the reins of her late husband's corporate duties, Stephanie introducing a montage of her father's greatest moments ...

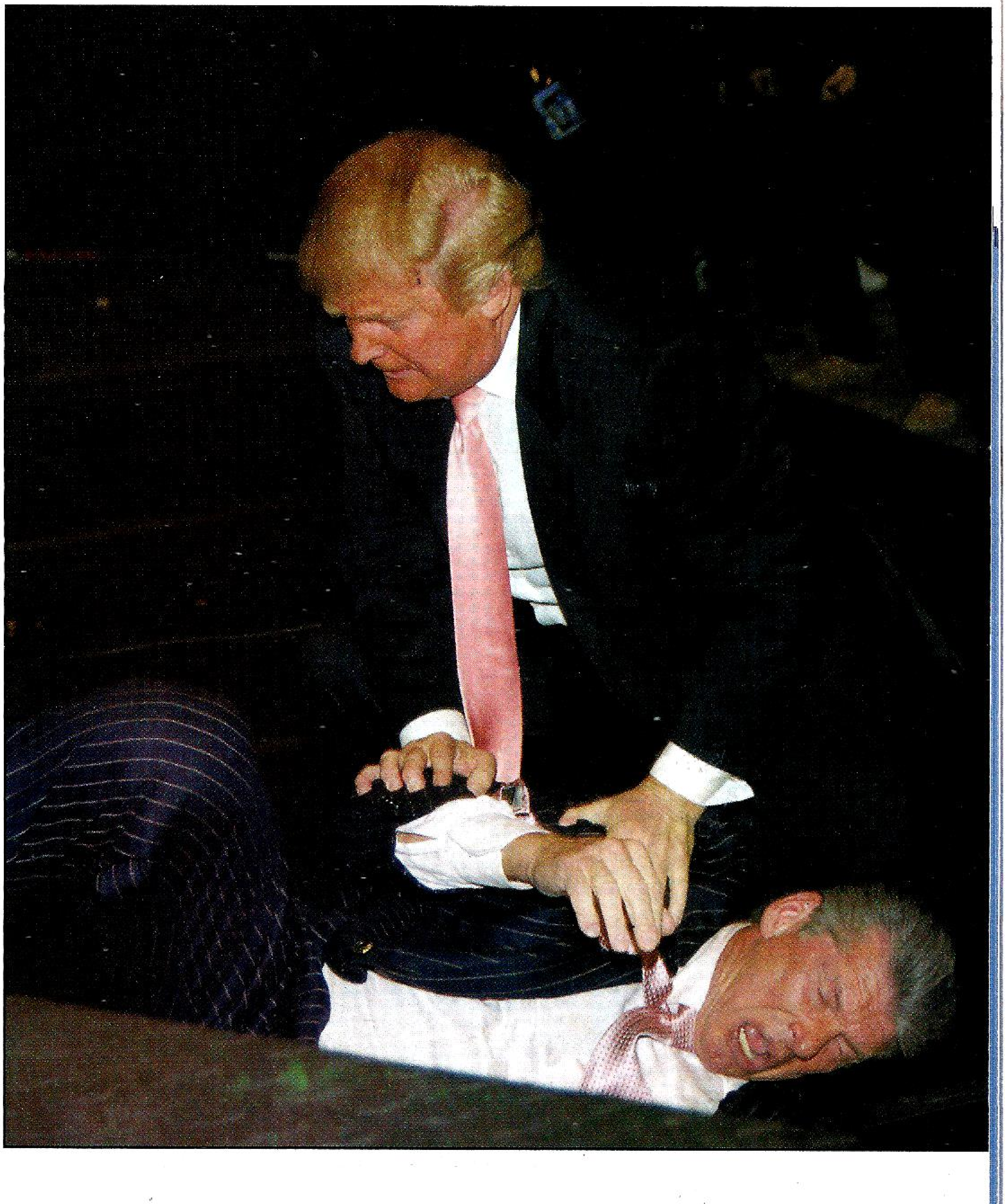
BURKETT: ... Shane turning against his mother for control of the company, Stephanie recruiting husband Triple-H fresh from the injured list to help defeat her brother—this might not turn out so bad after all.

LENKER: I suppose that all depends on your definition of bad ...

SAKS: Okay, even though I think your interest in this angle proves there is some value in McMahon family appearances, let's get back on topic. Dave, why don't you give the final words? What—if any—role do you think the McMahons should play on television?

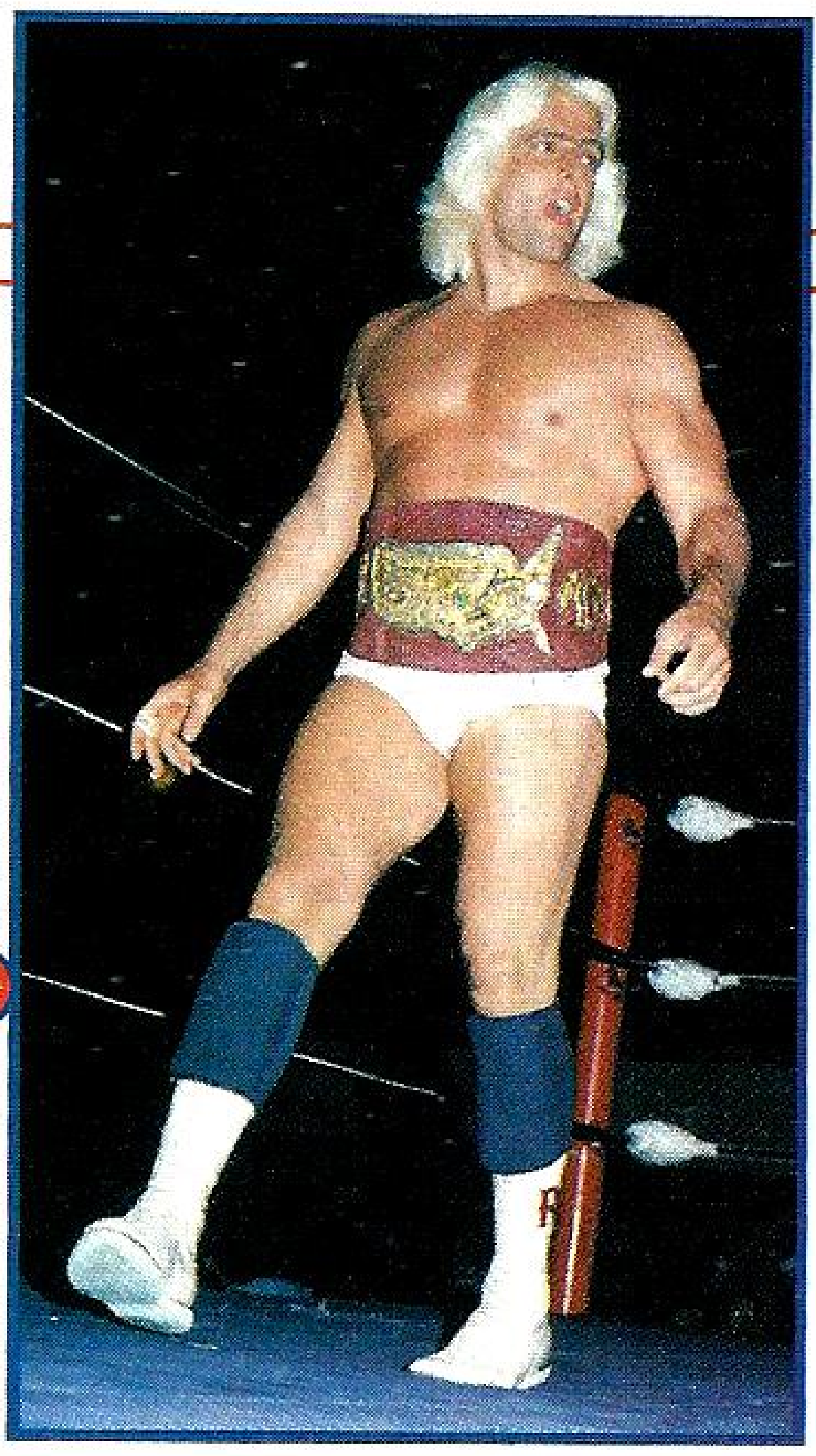
LENKER: It's far more exciting when one of them returns after an extended hiatus to cause a stir. They seem to lose their effectiveness by showing up on a weekly basis. If they want to maintain a presence on television, it would be best if they do so sparingly.

SAKS: Thank you, gentlemen. □



No one can accuse Vince of not giving his all to his company. WrestleMania drew 1.2 million pay-per-view buys. What would the number have been had McMahon and Donald Trump's hair not been on the line?

wrestling timeline



DECEMBER 10, 1972:
Flair gains an impressive time-limit draw in his first professional match, against George "Scrap Iron" Gadaski, in the AWA. He would stay with the promotion only a few years before going to Jim Crockett Promotions.

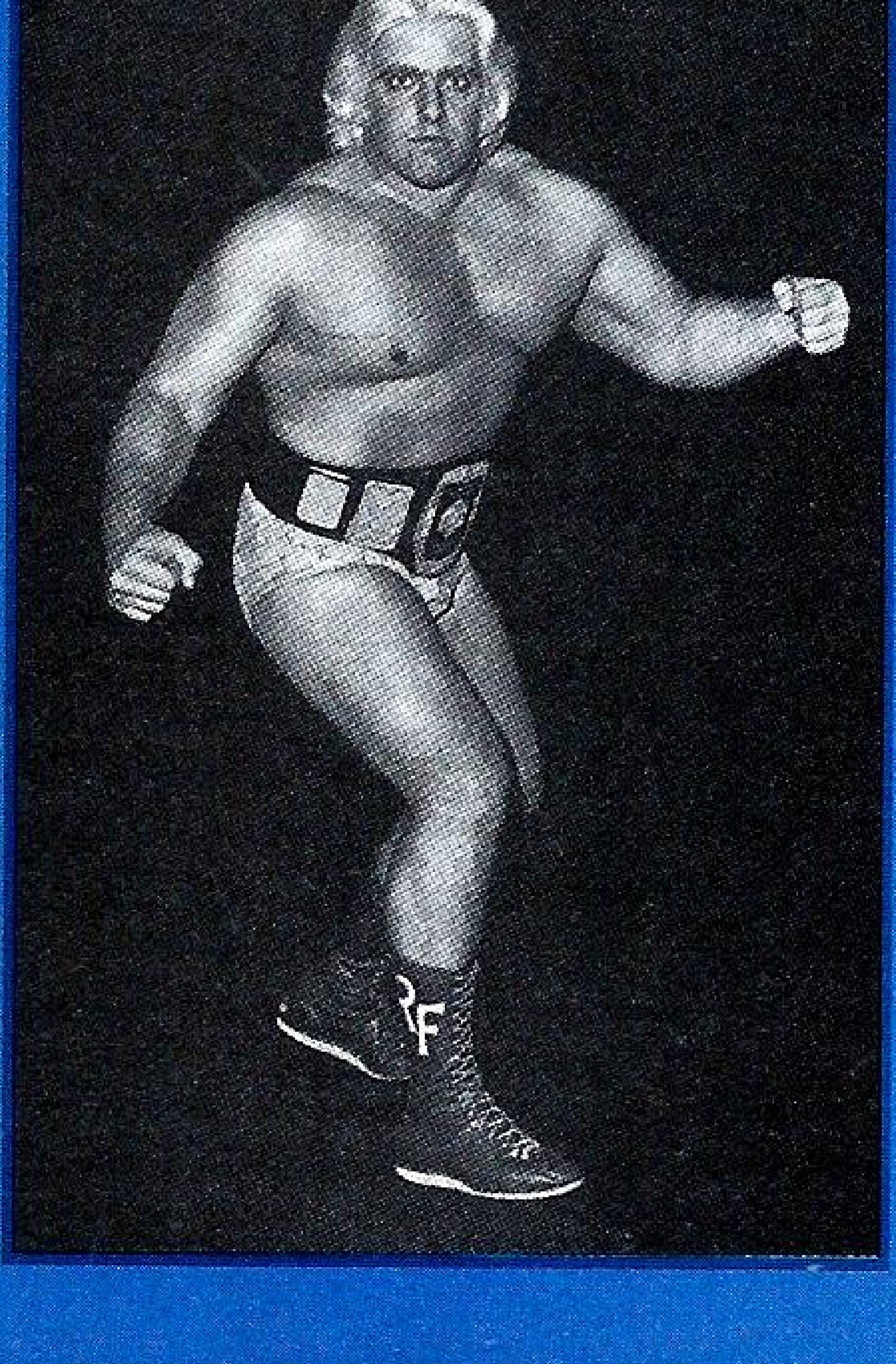
OCTOBER 4, 1975:
Flair, Johnny Valentine, Bob Bruggers, and "Mr. Wrestling" Tim Woods are involved in a plane crash that severely injures the "Nature Boy's" back and puts his career in jeopardy.

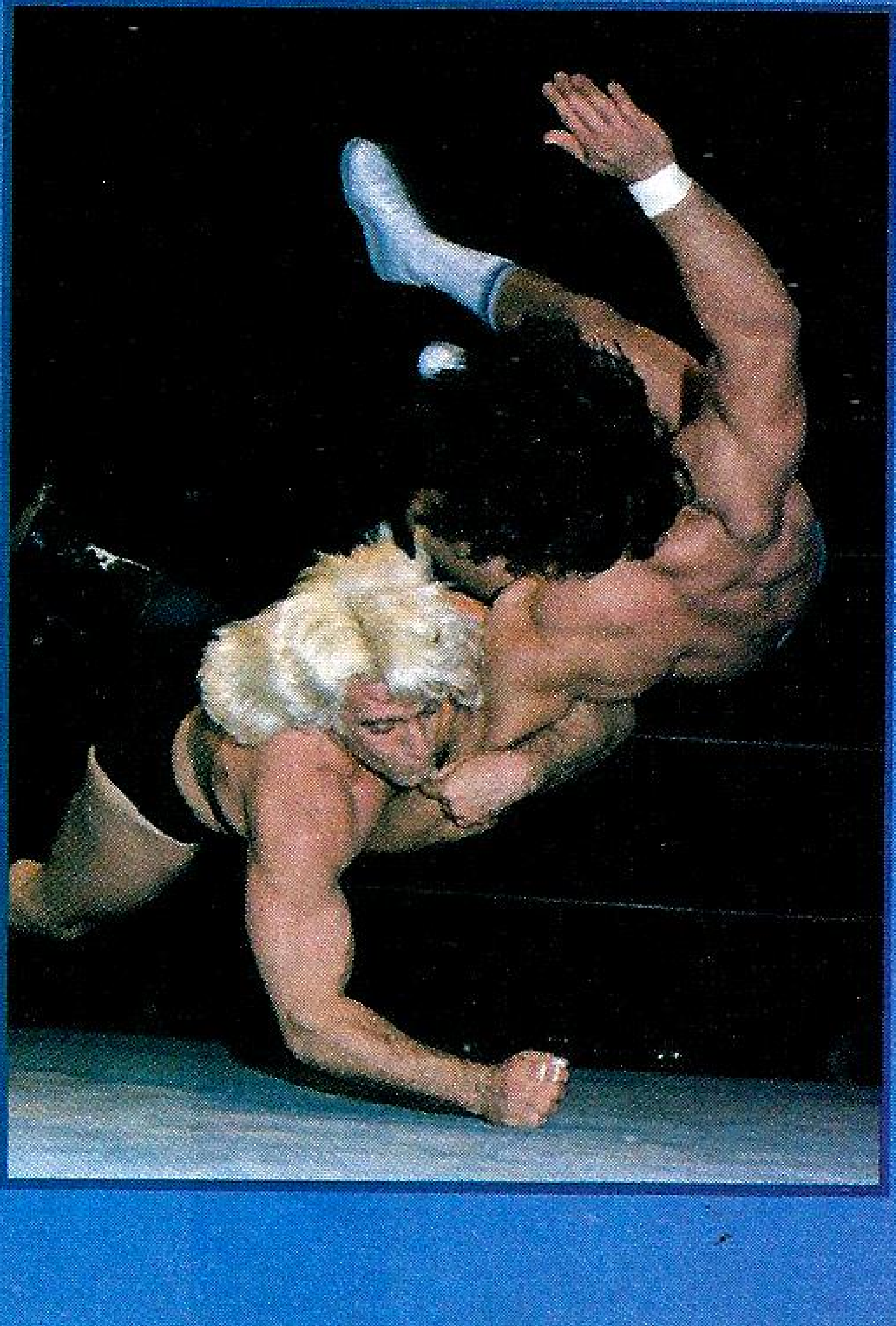
JULY 27, 1977:
Not without gold for long, Flair wins the first of his record six NWA U.S. heavyweight titles, defeating Bobo Brazil.

FEBRUARY 25, 1949:
Richard Morgan Fliehr is born in Memphis, Tennessee, and is adopted in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

JULY 4, 1974:
Teaming with Rip Hawk, Flair captures his first championship—the Mid-Atlantic tag team title.

JUNE 15, 1977:
In the first of many big head-to-head encounters, Flair loses the Mid-Atlantic TV title to young upstart Rick Steamboat. Oddly enough, their feud was built on both mutual disdain and admiration.





Ric Flair

***Inside Wrestling* journeys back in time to examine the career of a superstar who has left a major imprint on the sport**

JANUARY 27, 1981:
Yet another personal rivalry blossoms after an NWA U.S. title loss to the fiery Roddy Piper. The two eventually would become very close friends outside the ring after a particularly vicious feud.

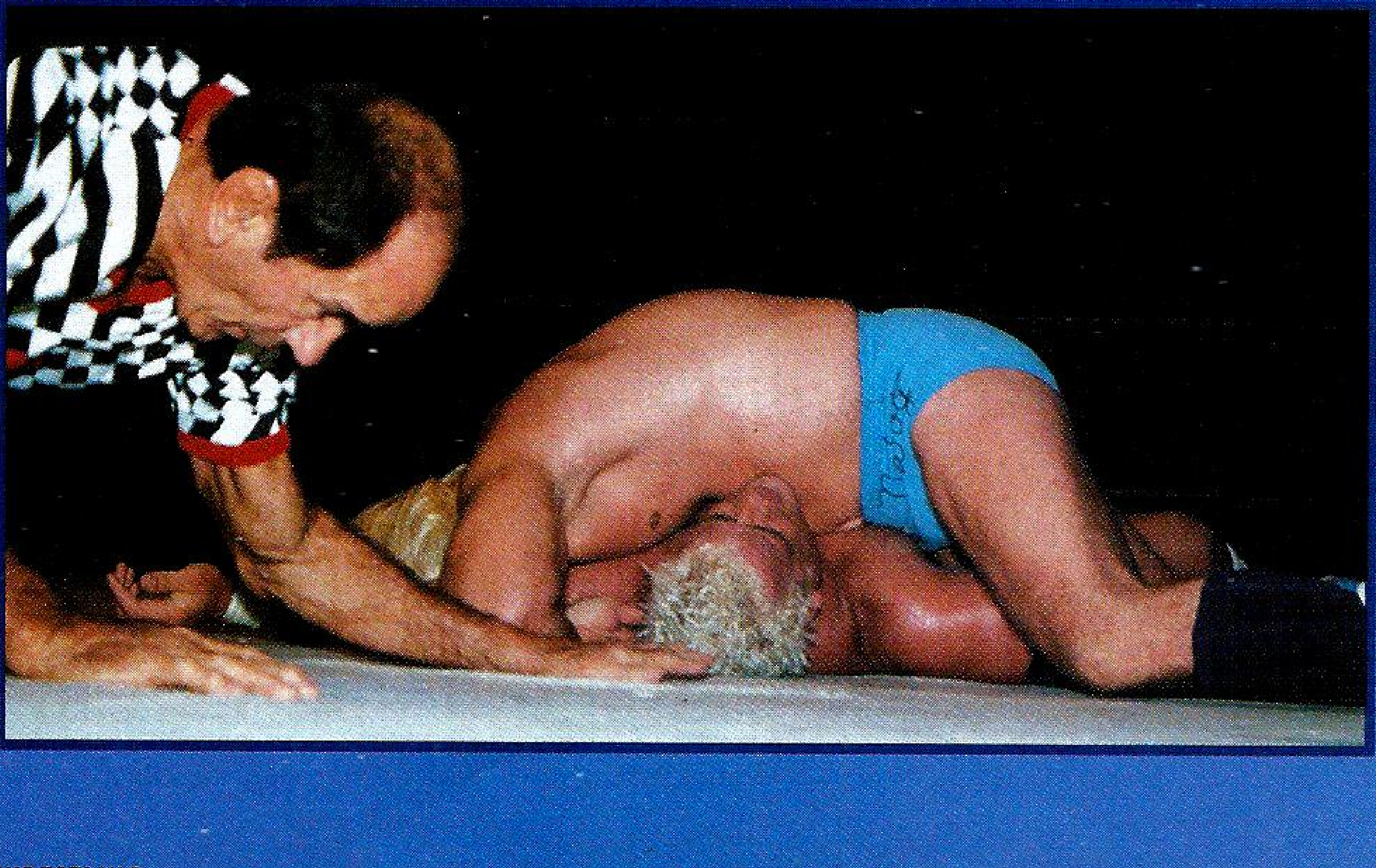
JULY 4, 1982:
In a rare cross-promotional battle of champions, Flair and WWF champion Bob Backlund battle to a double-disqualification, yet fans walk away satisfied.

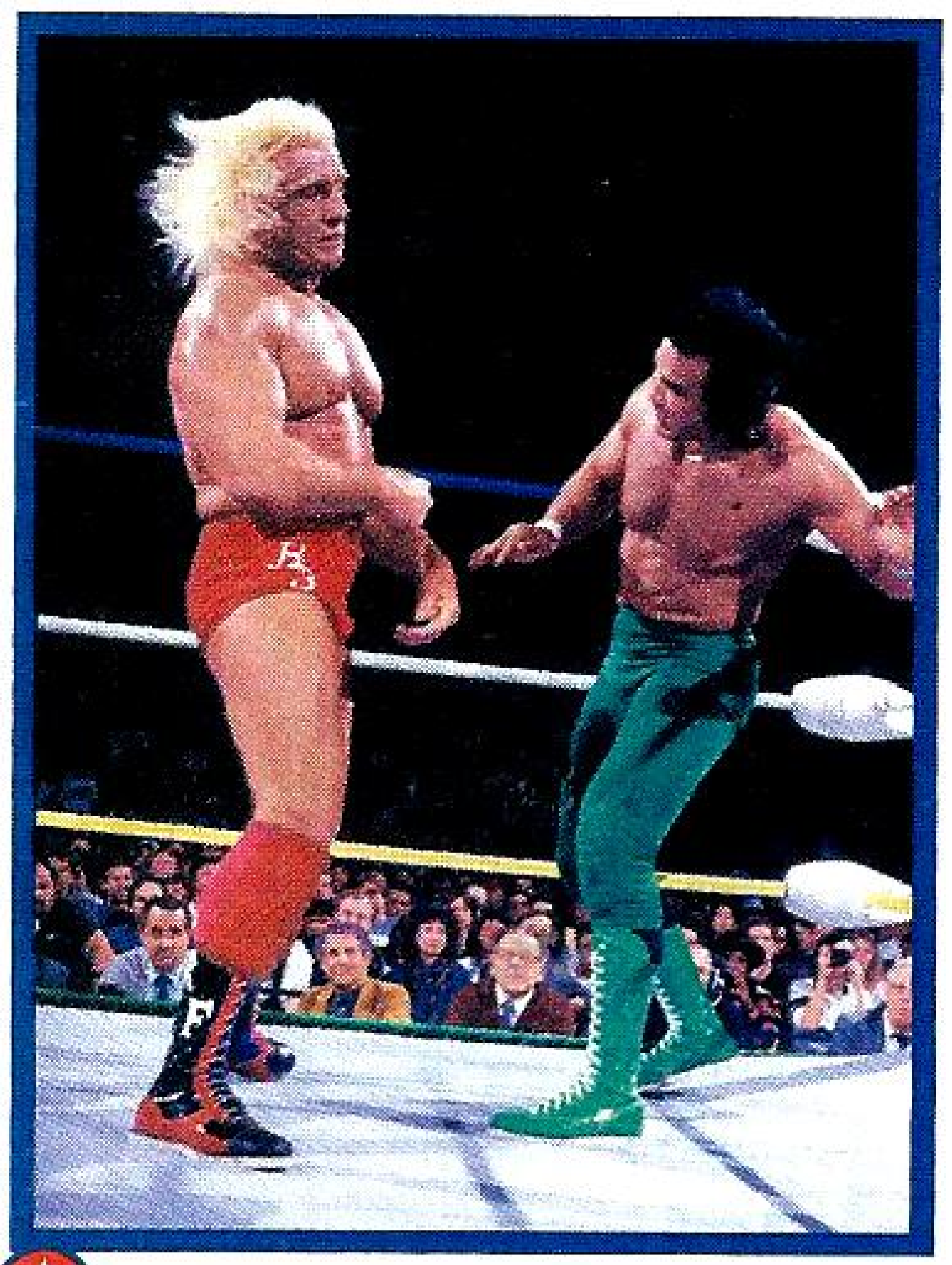
NOVEMBER 28, 1985:
Following their assistance at Starrcade 1985, Flair formally aligns himself with the Andersons, and, later, Tully Blanchard and his manager, J.J. Dillon. Later, Arn Anderson makes an off-the-cuff remark during a promo, labeling them as The Four Horsemen.

SEPTEMBER 17, 1981:
Flair reaches the top of the NWA mountain, capturing the World title for the first time by defeating the popular Dusty Rhodes in Kansas City, Missouri.

NOVEMBER 22, 1984:
At Starrcade 1984, special referee "Smokin'" Joe Frazier declares Flair the winner of the "Million-Dollar Challenge" after he determines that Dusty Rhodes is cut too deeply to continue.

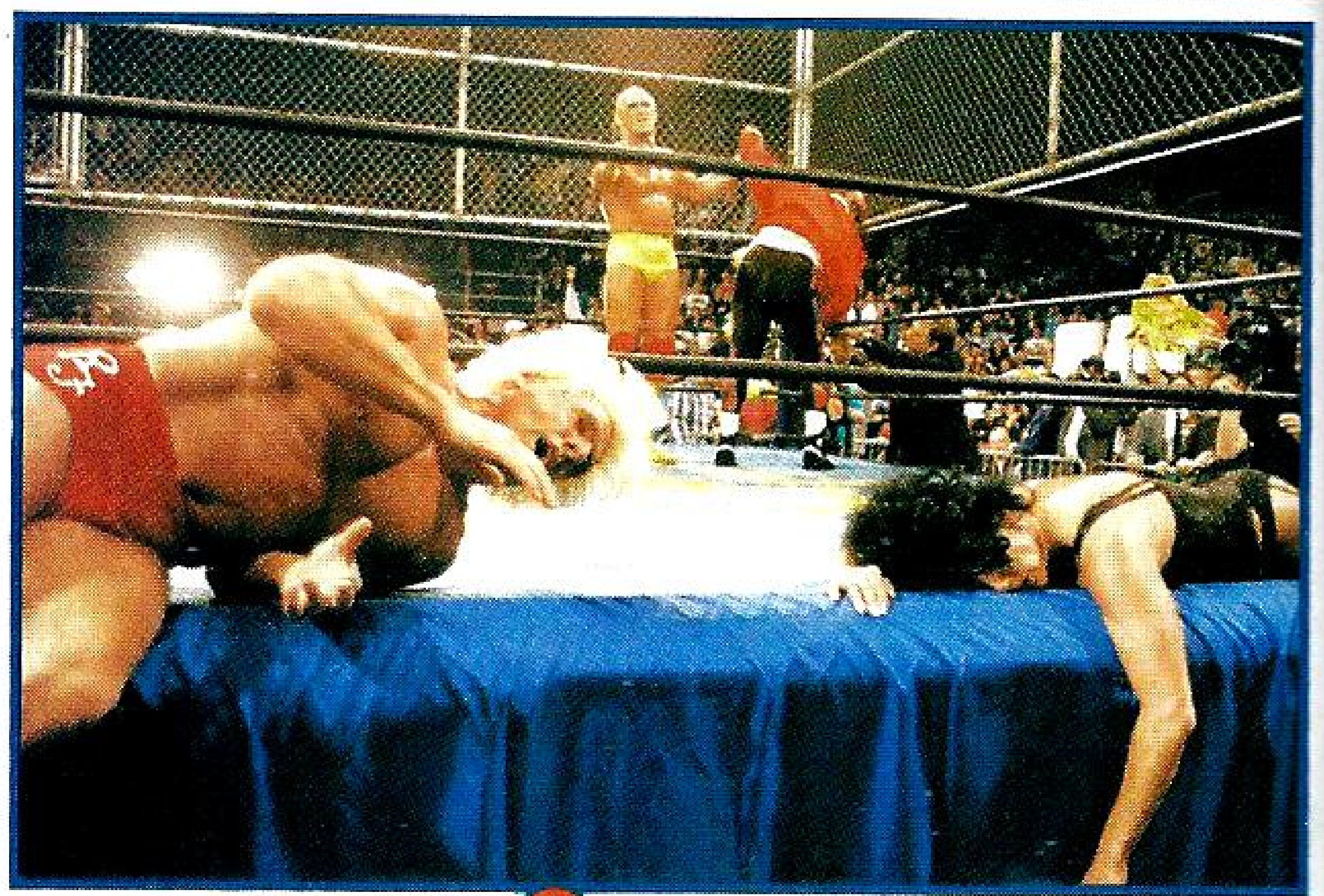
SEPTEMBER 29, 1985:
Proving he is the "dirtiest player in the game," Flair, along with Ole and Arn Anderson, attacks Dusty Rhodes—who came out to his aid—following the "Nature Boy's" cage match with Nikita Koloff.





FEBRUARY 20, 1989:
The feud is resumed as Rick "The Dragon" Steamboat defeats Flair for the NWA World title shortly after returning to WCW. Flair would regain the strap two months later.

SEPTEMBER 14, 1991:
After a contentious split with WCW, Flair appears on WWF television with the NWA World title belt, claiming to be the "real" world champion.

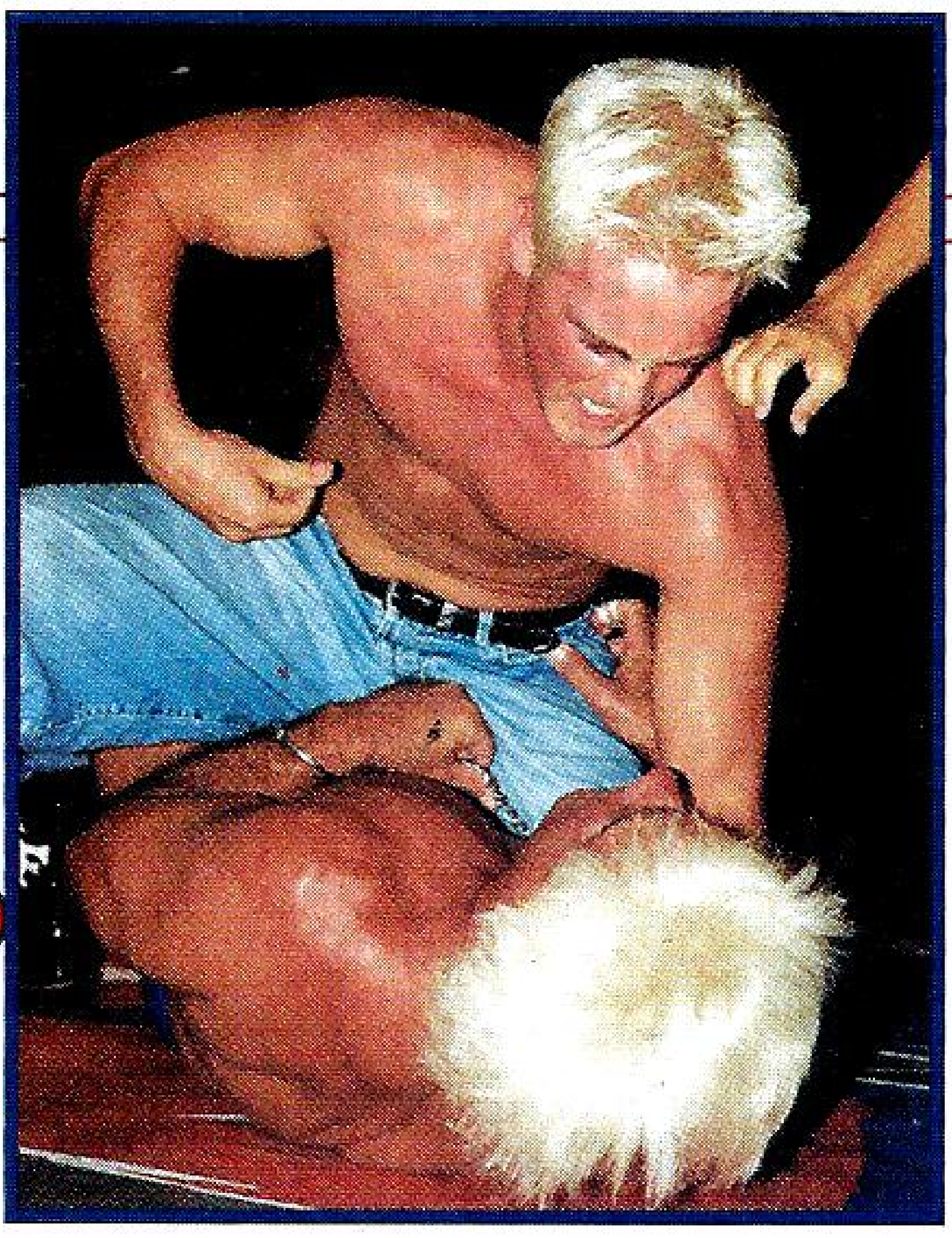


OCTOBER 23, 1994:
Flair loses a retirement match to WCW's latest acquisition, new World champion Hulk Hogan, at Halloween Havoc—his second loss to "The Hulkster" in three months.

FEBRUARY 6, 1990:
A promising partnership ends before it gets a chance to truly take hold as Sting is exiled from The Four Horsemen, who attack Sting at the Clash of the Champions after he refuses to forfeit a shot at Flair's title.

MARCH 21, 1991:
Flair loses the WCW/NWA World title to Japanese star Tatsumi Fujinami in a controversial match. The WCW title is returned to Flair later; however the NWA championship is awarded to Fujinami.

JANUARY 19, 1992:
After winning the 1992 Royal Rumble only four months following his surprise emergence in the WWF, Flair is awarded the WWF World championship. He would hold the title twice before returning to WCW in 1993.



MARCH 19, 1995:
The "Nature Boy" returns to action after being "retired" for only five months. Dressed as a woman, Flair rushes into the ring and interferes in Hogan's match with Big Van Vader.

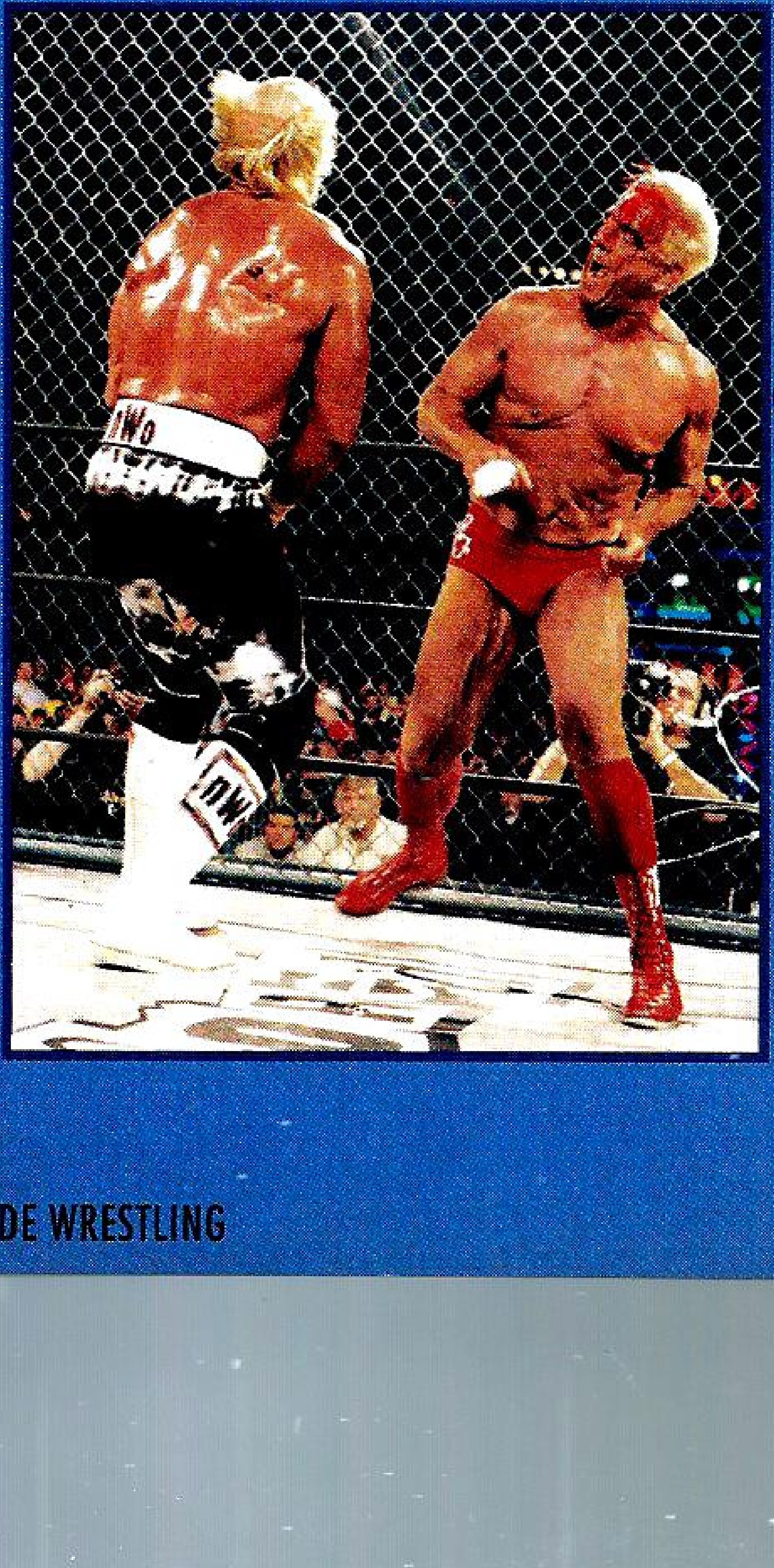
DECEMBER 28, 1998:
After months of non-use and forced sabbaticals that last longer than any of his retirements, Flair makes yet another return and pins the NWO's Eric Bischoff in a special stipulation match to become WCW "president."

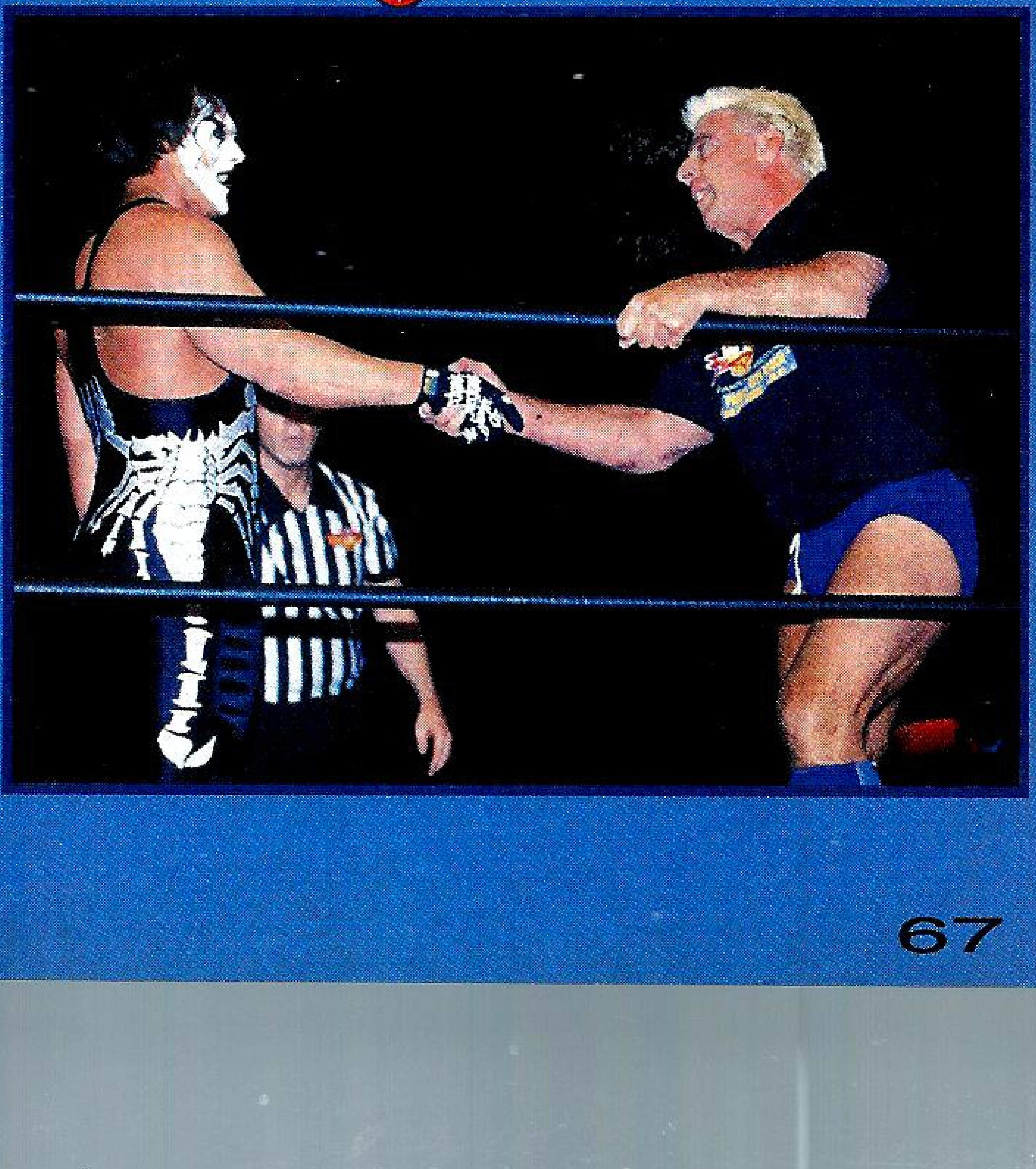
JUNE 11, 2000:
In a strange turn of events, father is forced to wrestle son as Ric defeats David Flair at The Great American Bash. The next night, David would gain his revenge by teaming with Vince Russo to defeat his father and younger brother Reid in a match stipulating that Flair must retire if his team loses. "Naitch" is sent into retirement yet again.

SEPTEMBER 15, 1996:
Flair, Arn Anderson, Sting, and Lex Luger form Team WCW and challenge the insurgent New World Order in a "War Games" match at Fall Brawl 1996. The WCW faction fails miserably.

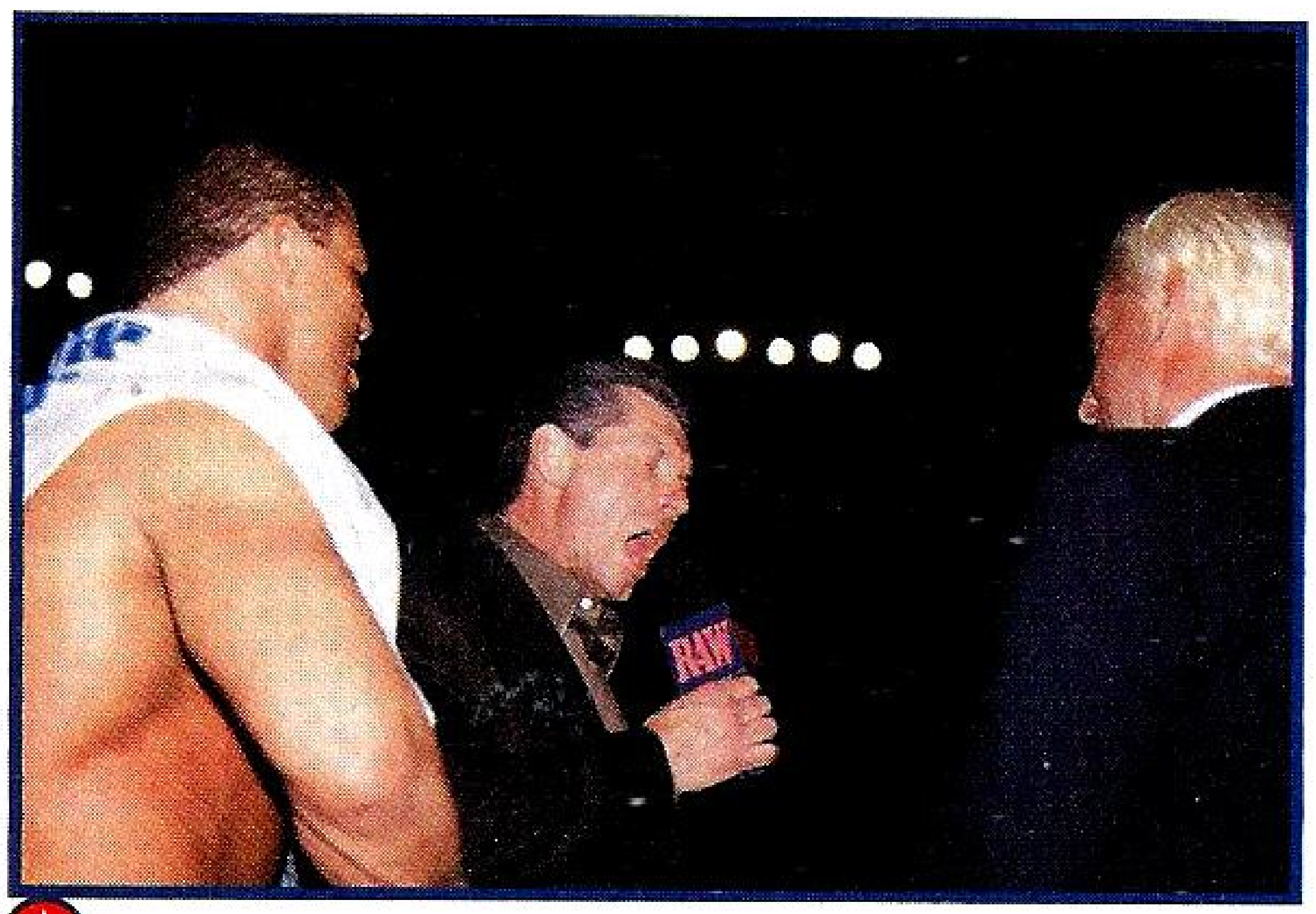
MARCH 14, 1999:
Flair gets the best of Hollywood Hogan in a steel cage match at WCW's Uncensored pay-per-view to win his sixth WCW World championship.

MARCH 26, 2001:
On the final broadcast of *WCW Monday Nitro*, Flair loses to longtime nemesis Sting in a grudge match that sees the two weary combatants embrace following the bout.





wrestling timeline



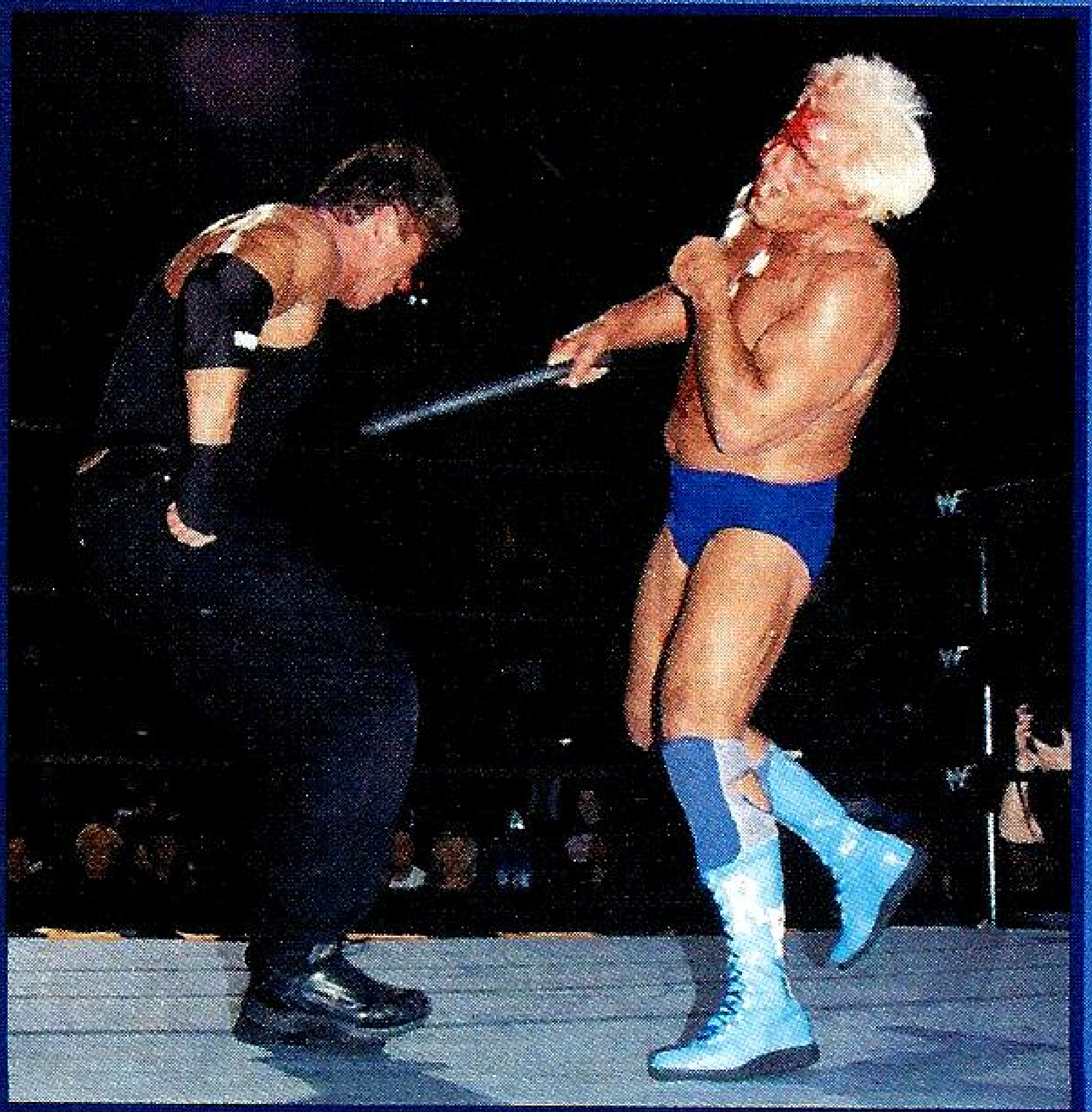
NOVEMBER 19, 2001:
Not one for subtleties, Flair makes a surprise return to the WWF, announcing to the world—and a stunned Vince McMahon—that he's co-owner of the company.

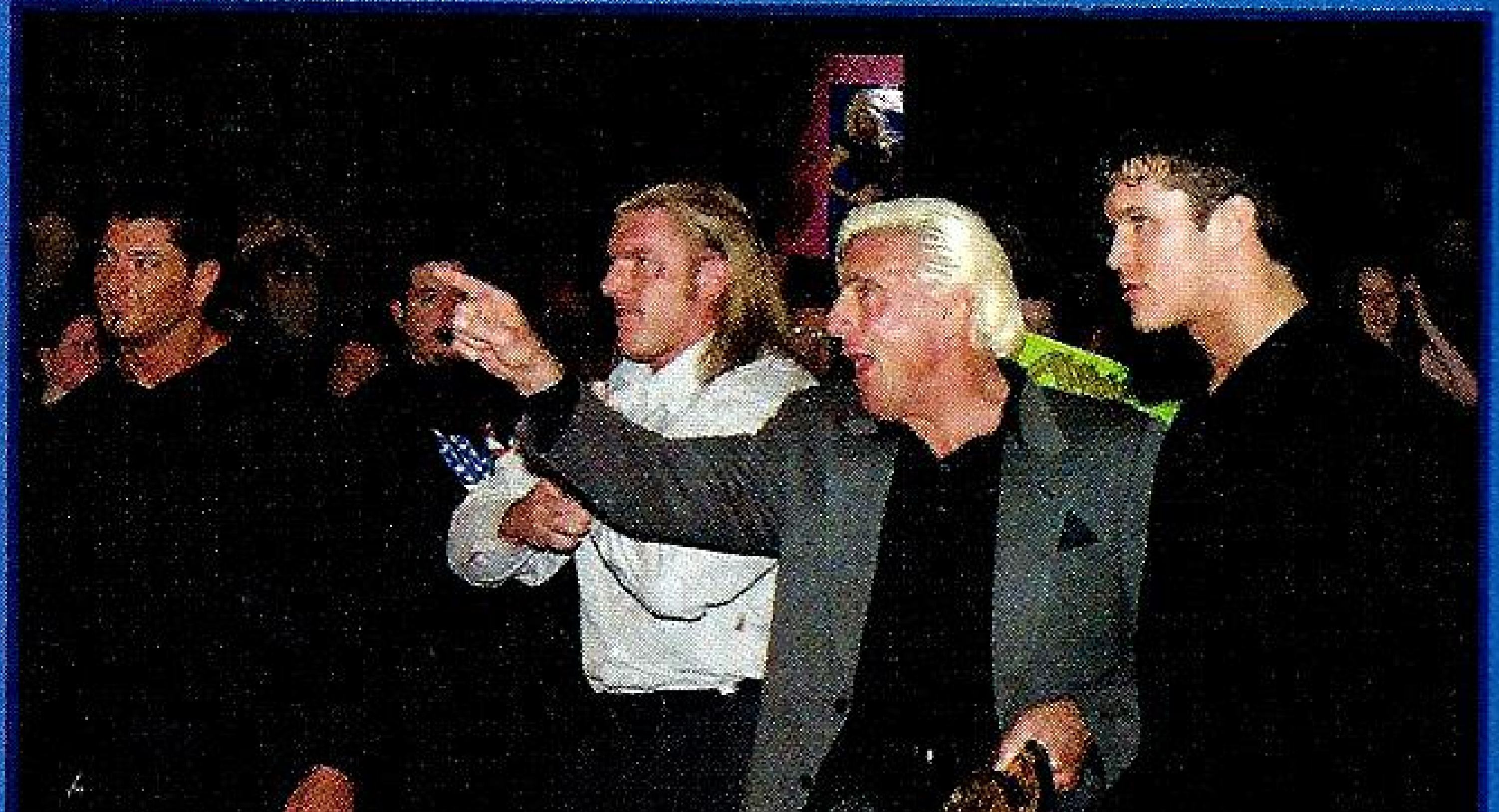
JUNE 10, 2002:
Seeking to gain full control of WWE, a classically bloodied Flair loses to Vince McMahon in a no-holds-barred match for complete ownership.

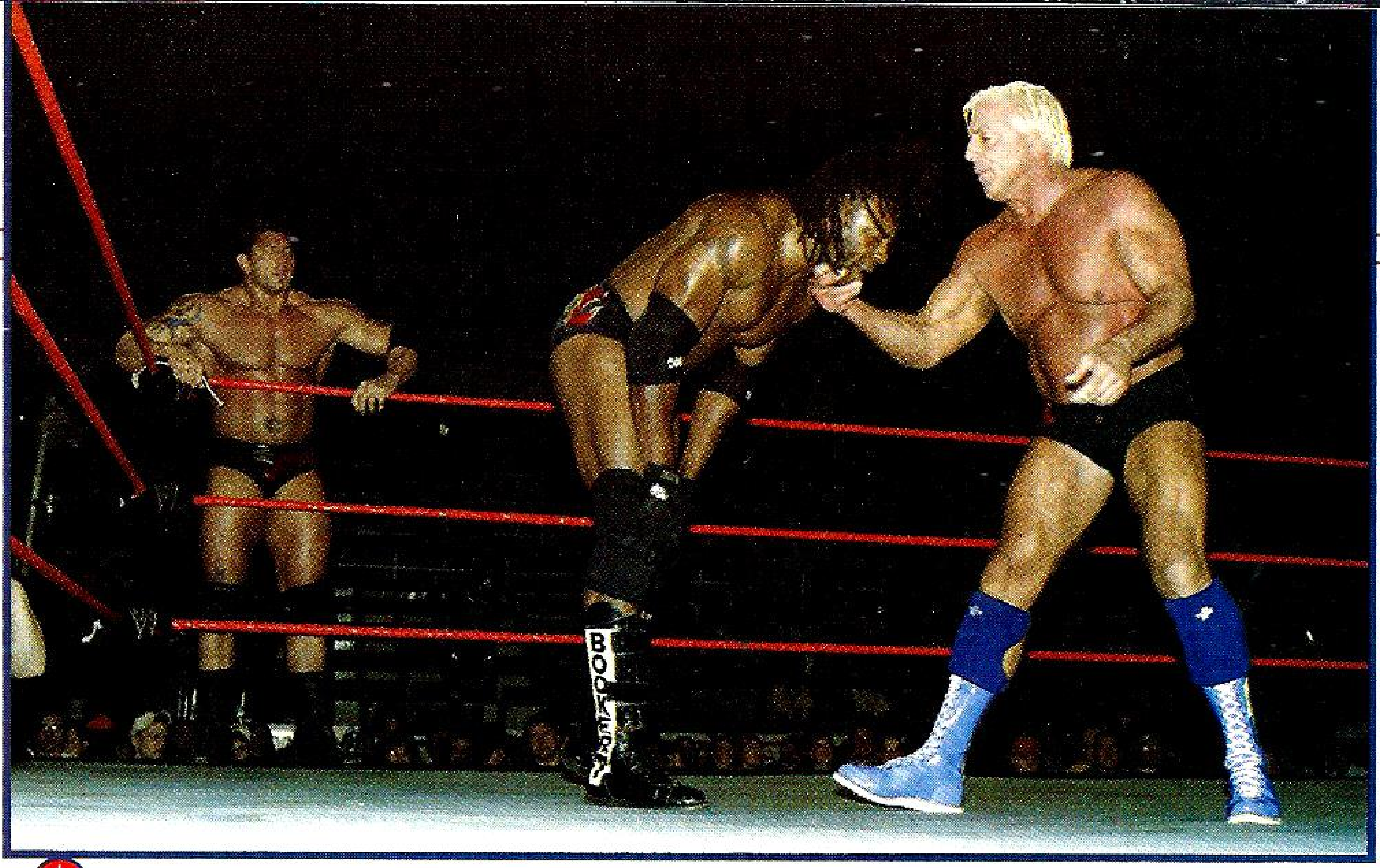
MAY 19, 2003:
Flair challenges Triple-H for the Raw World championship and loses in a very closely contested match that sees the entire brand's roster come to the ring afterward to salute the fallen challenger.

JANUARY 20, 2002:
The inevitable return to the ring commences as Flair challenges—and then defeats—Vince McMahon in a streetfight at the 2002 Royal Rumble.

SEPTEMBER 22, 2002:
Flair shocks fans by helping Triple-H defeat the popular Rob Van Dam at WWE's Unforgiven pay-per-view. The duo would later add Batista and Randy Orton to form Evolution.







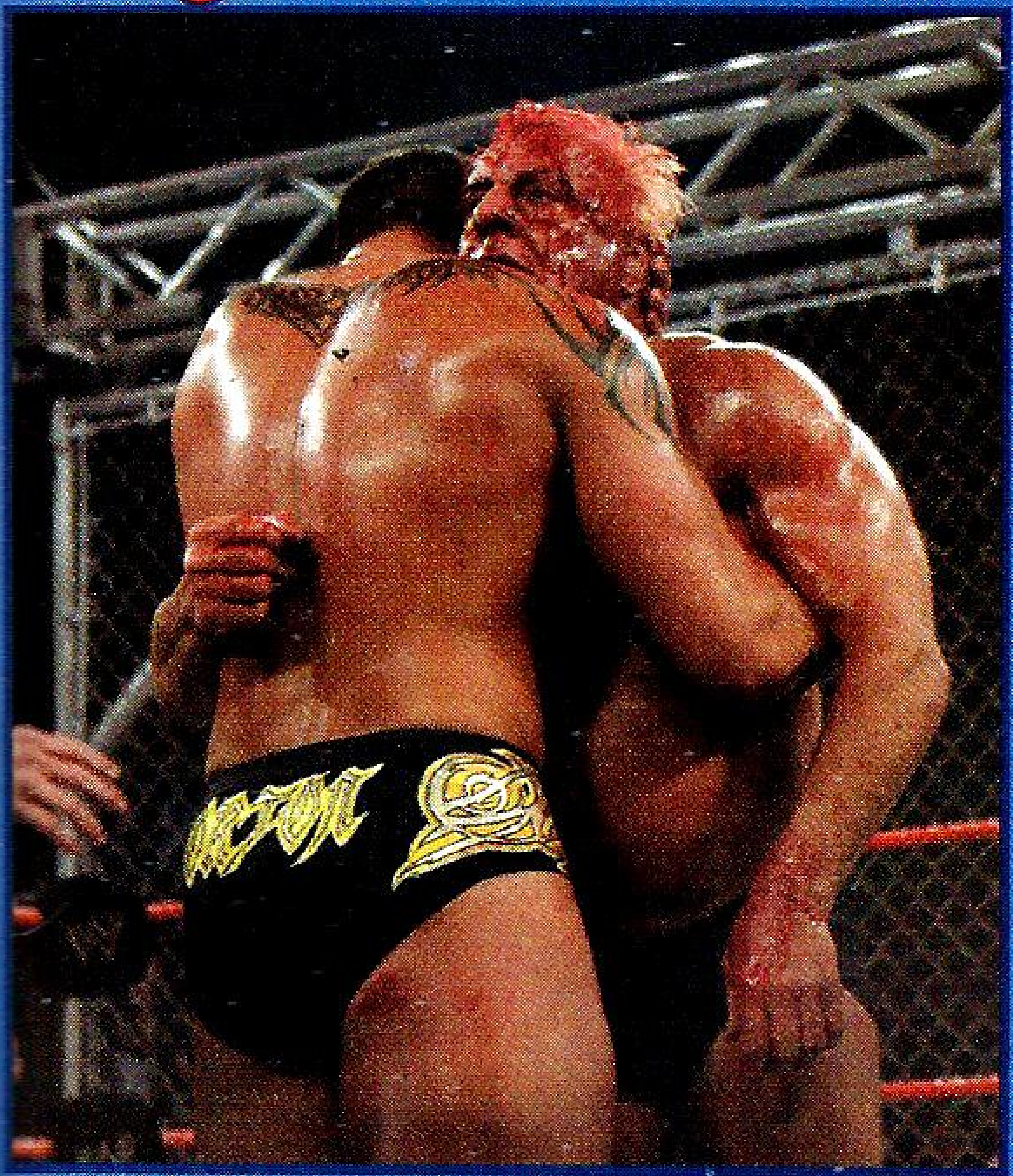
MARCH 22, 2004:
On the night of the WWE draft lottery, Evolution members Flair and Batista defeat Booker T and Rob Van Dam to capture the Raw World tag team title.

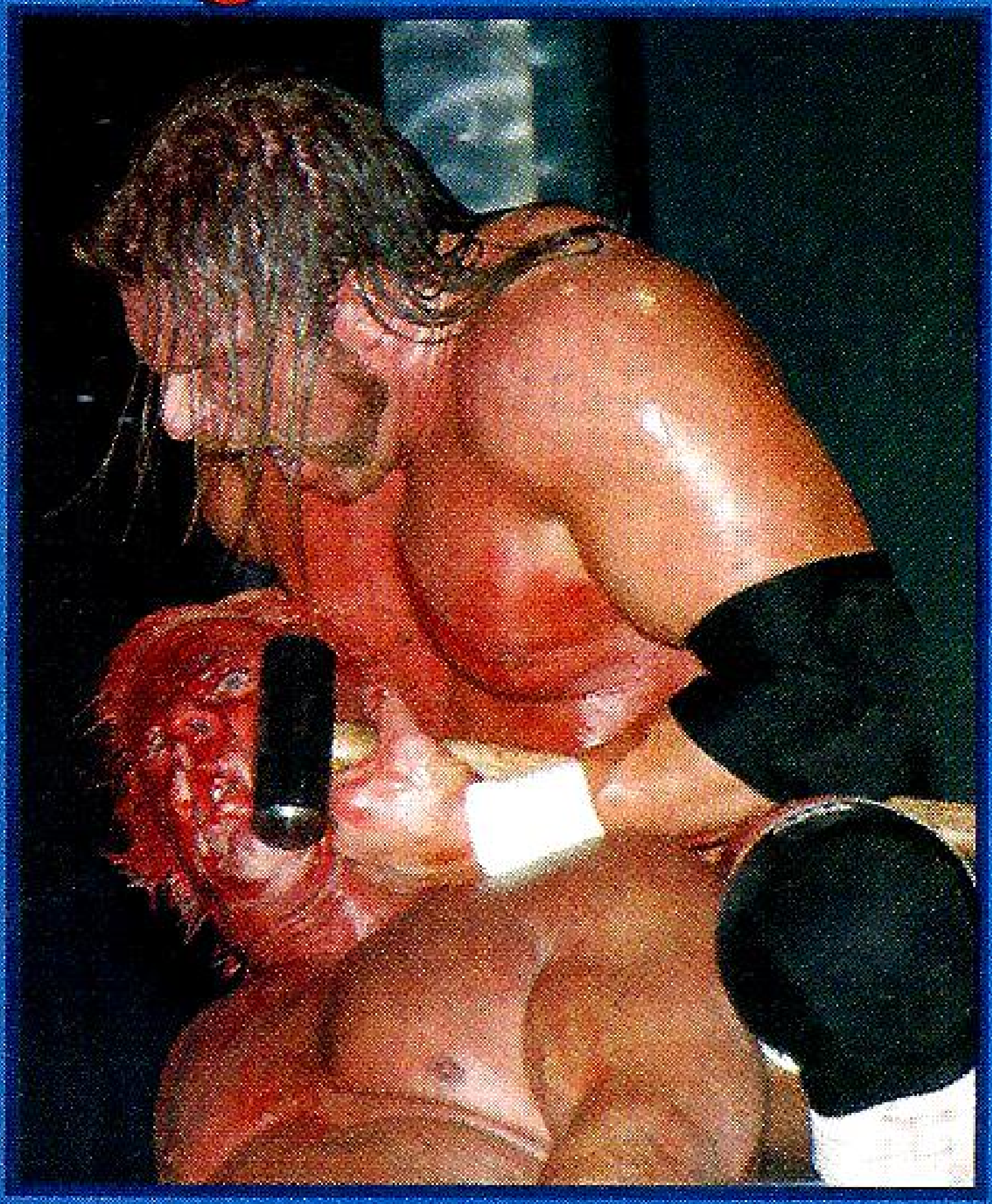
NOVEMBER 29, 2004:
Two legends of the ring meet for the first time on WWE television when Flair defeats Jerry "The King" Lawler on an episode of Raw.

SEPTEMBER 18, 2005:
After 30 years in the business, Flair achieves yet another first, as he captures the Intercontinental championship from Carlito at WWE's Unforgiven.

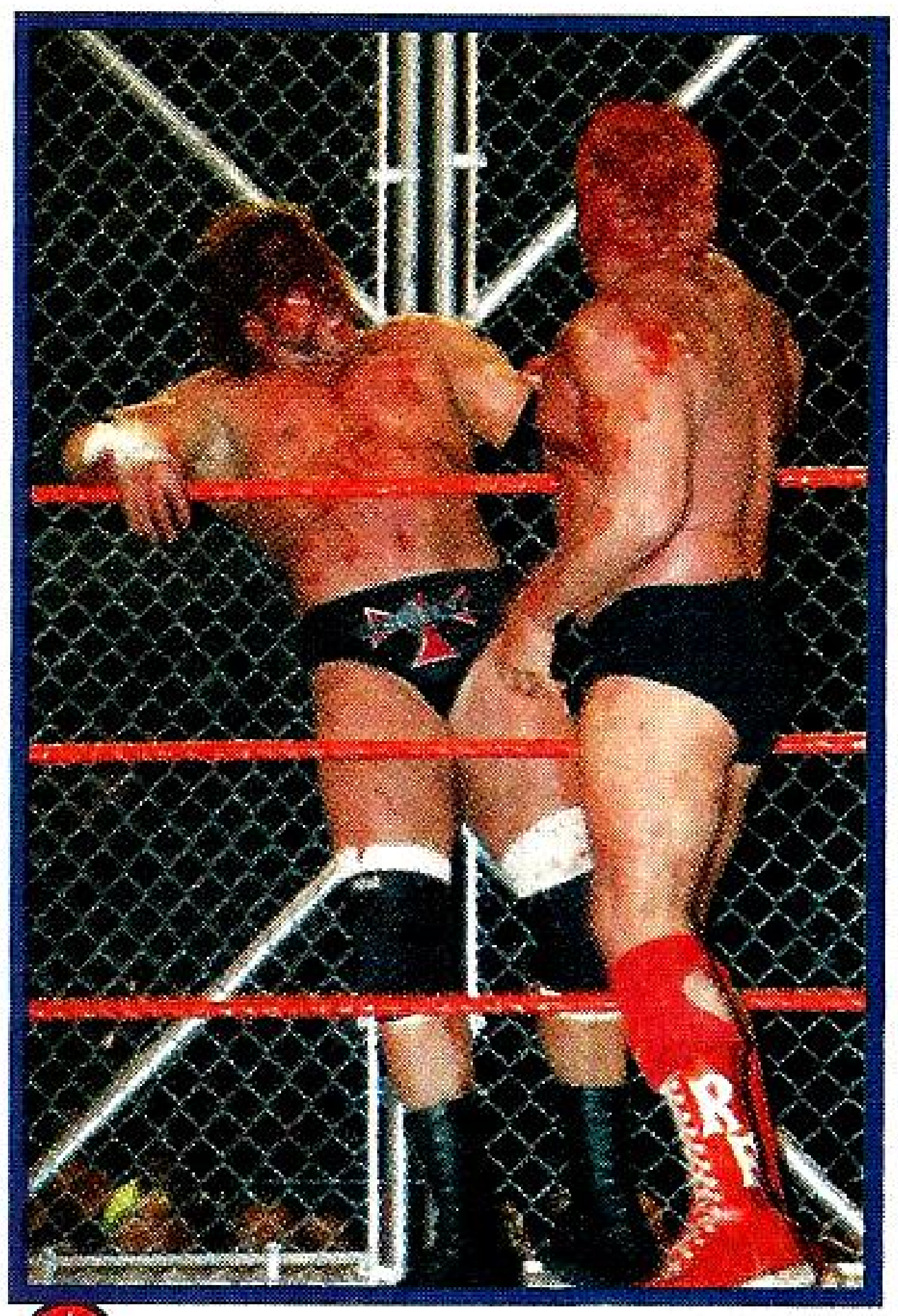
OCTOBER 19, 2004:
Flair defeats Randy Orton at Taboo Tuesday in a brutal steel cage match that saw the two congratulate each other at the conclusion despite the young "Legend Killer's" unceremonious expulsion from Evolution earlier in the year.

OCTOBER 3, 2005:
Riding high from his Intercontinental title victory and the return of his "best friend," Triple-H, Flair is shocked when "The Game" viciously turns against him during Raw's "Homecoming" show.





wrestling timeline

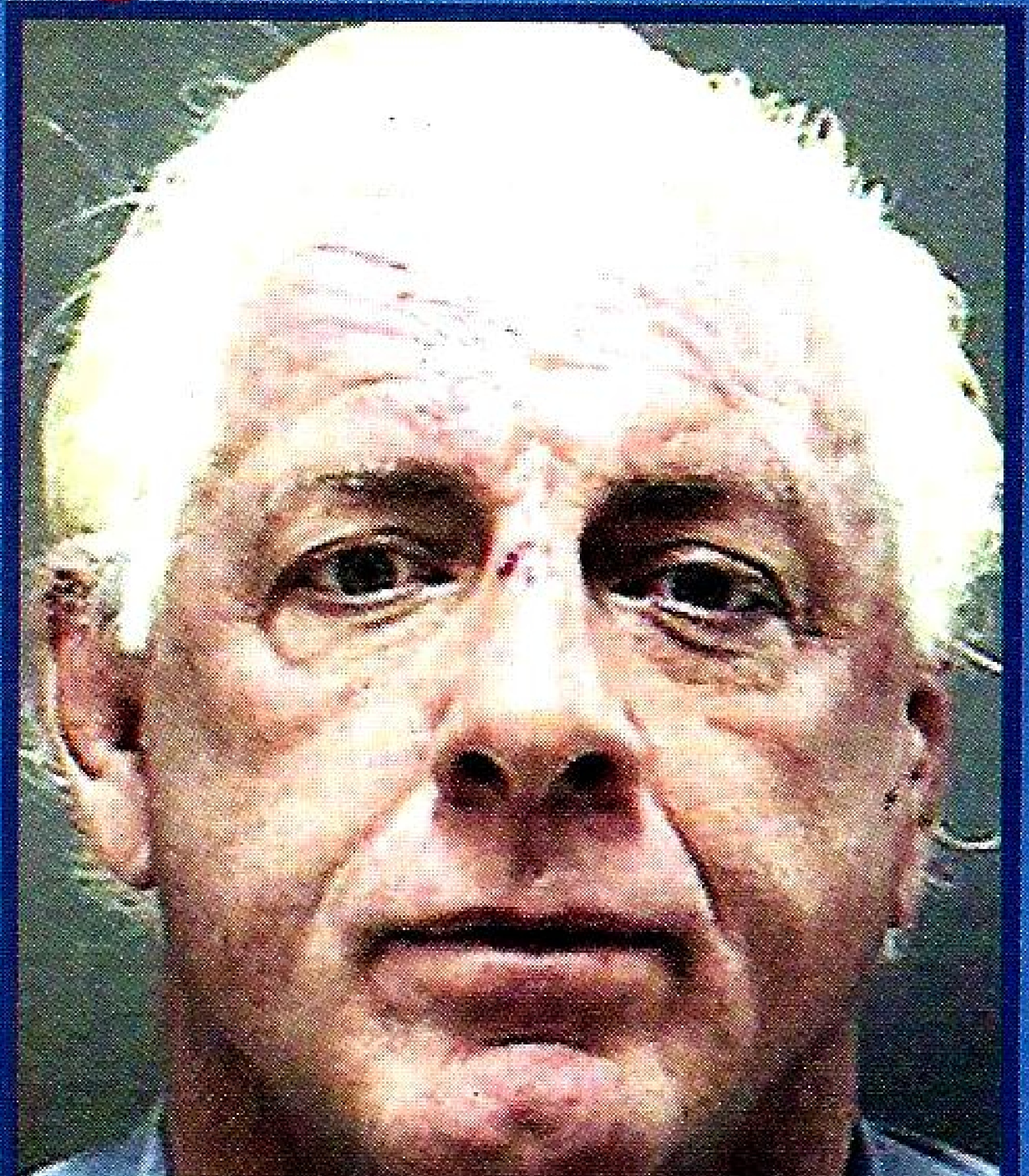


NOVEMBER 1, 2005:
Flair gains some modicum of revenge and retains the Intercontinental title, defeating Triple-H in a steel cage match at Taboo Tuesday.

JANUARY 9, 2006:
Making the save for everyone in attendance, Flair breaks up Edge and Lita's "Live Sex Celebration" on Raw. Edge gained revenge a week later by defeating Flair in a TLC match for the Raw World title.

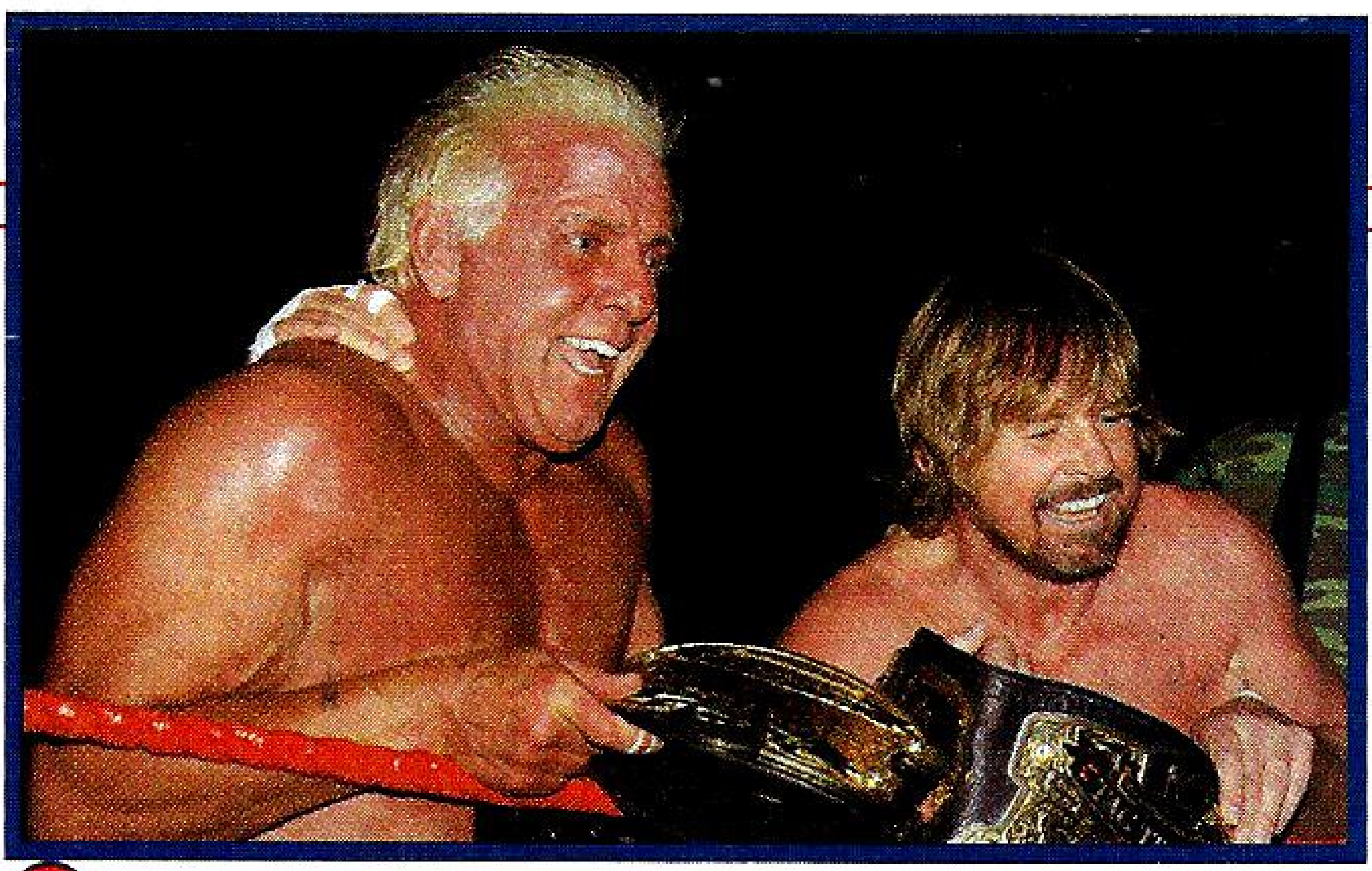
JULY 11, 2006:
A sight fans never thought they'd see comes true when Flair competes in an ECW ring, falling to then-champion The Big Show on a weekly episode of the hardcore brand's program.

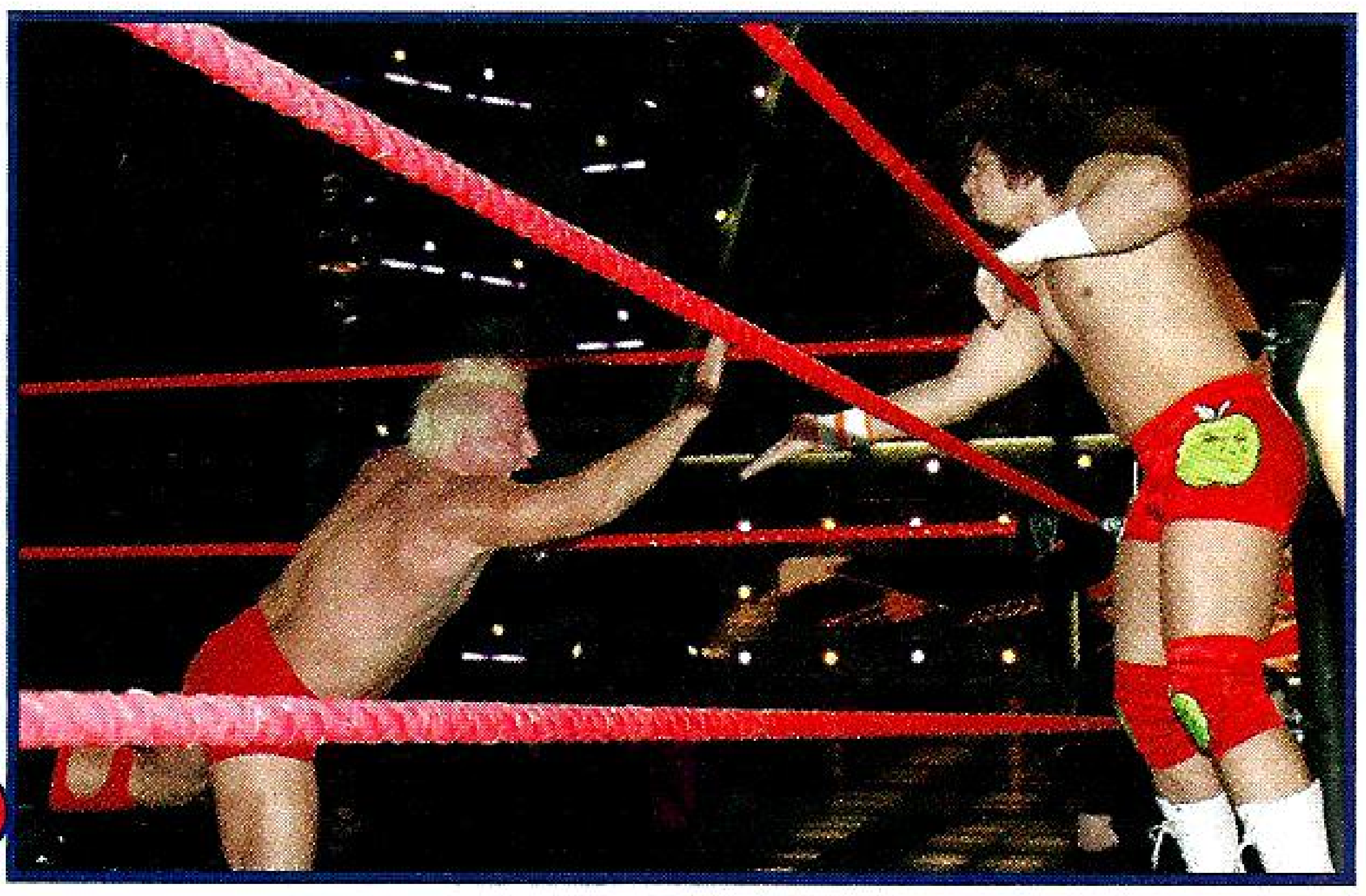
JANUARY 2, 2006:
Facing allegations of road rage as well as a litany of other personal issues, Flair's outside troubles are brought into his angle with Edge when the "Rated R Superstar" mocks Flair on "The Cutting Edge."



APRIL 2, 2006:
Competing admirably and nearly getting the victory, Flair competes in the second annual "Money In The Bank" ladder match at WrestleMania 22 in Chicago. Rob Van Dam wins the match.

AUGUST 20, 2006:
After weeks of vicious promos are traded back and forth, the "Nature Boy" and "Hardcore Legend" meet up in an "I Quit" match at SummerSlam 2006 with Flair getting the victory.





NOVEMBER 5, 2006:
Fans choose Roddy Piper to be Flair's tag team partner at Cyber Sunday and the tandem defeats The Spirit Squad to capture the Raw World tag team title.

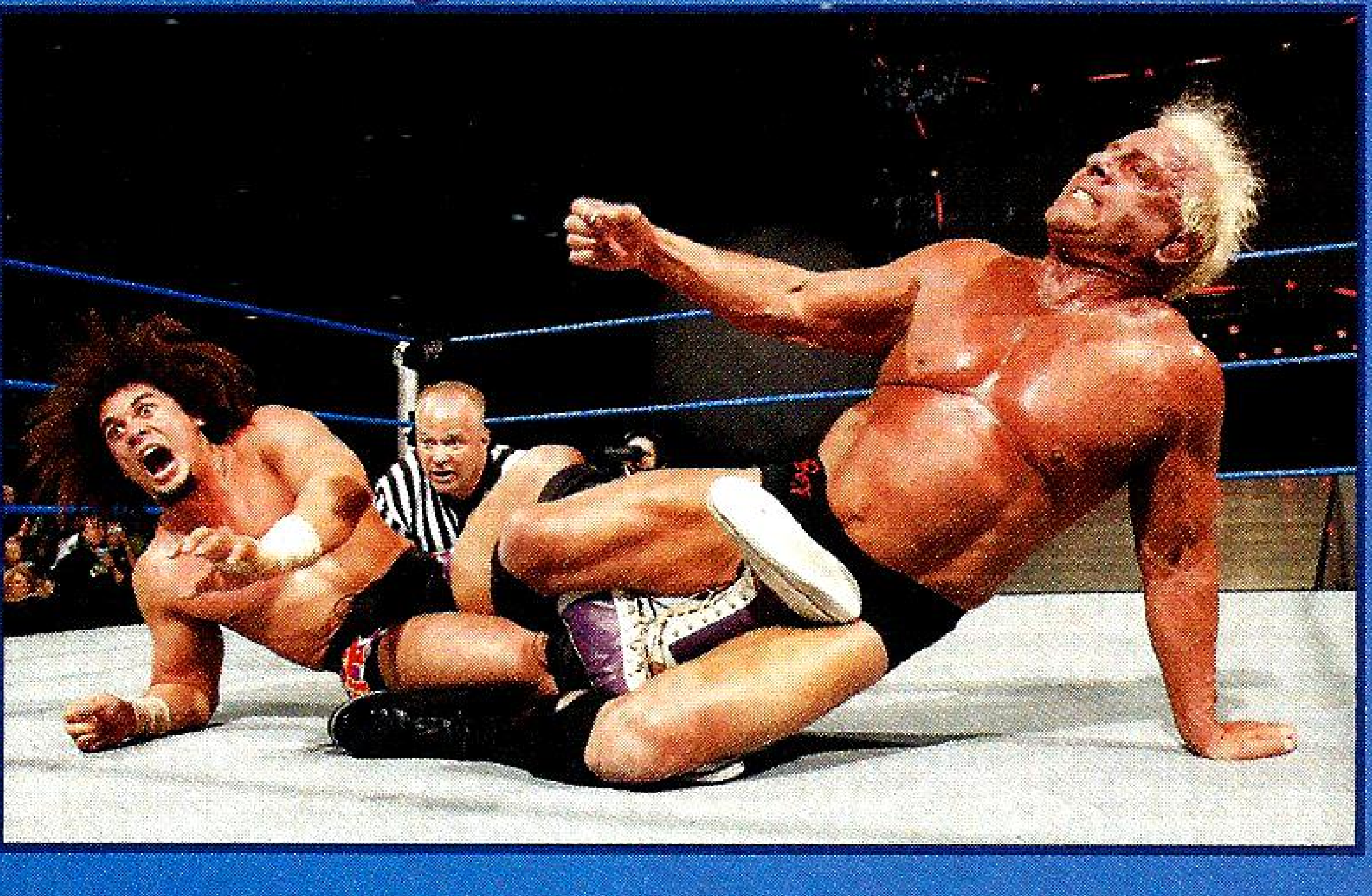
DECEMBER 11, 2006:
Flair and DeGeneration X defeat Rated RKO and Kenny Dykstra in a six-man tag match on Raw. Triple-H and Shawn Michaels recognize the "Nature Boy" as an unofficial member of the degenerate faction.

MARCH 12, 2007:
Flair and Carlito embark on a tumultuous partnership in which they argue as much as they cooperate. The 16-time world champion had accused Carlito of not living up to his career potential.

APRIL 1, 2007:
In something of a shocker, Flair and Carlito are not added to the card for WrestleMania 23 in Detroit. The duo participates in a pre-event match, defeating Gregory Helms and Chavo Guerrero Jr. Their partnership would end only a few weeks later with Carlito turning against the "Nature Boy."

MAY 20, 2007:
The legend schools the up-and-comer at Judgment Day when Flair defeats Carlito via the figure-four leglock.

JUNE 12, 2007:
One day after being sent from Raw to Smackdown as a result of WWE's draft lottery, Flair beats Smackdown World champion Edge by disqualification when Montel Vontavious Porter saves Edge from Flair's dreaded figure-four.



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ROLL CALL OF CHAMPIONS

FOR PERIOD ENDED JUNE 21, 2007

Championships highlighted in bold on the "Roll Call Of Champions" have changed hands since our previous issue. The information under the championship listing indicates the date that champion won the title, who the former champion was, and where the match took place.

ALL JAPAN INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TOSHIAKI KAWADA & TAIYO KEA
(February 17, 2007; from Ro'Z & Suwana; Tokyo, Japan)

ALL JAPAN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: KATSUHIKO NAKAJIMA
(February 17, 2007; from Shuji Kondo; Tokyo, Japan)

ALL JAPAN TRIPLE CROWN CHAMPION: MINORU SUZUKI
(September 3, 2006; from Taiyo Kea; Sapporo, Japan)

AMERICAN WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: TAKAO OMORI
(March 31, 2007; from Steve Corino; Yokohama, Japan)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: ADEN CHAMBERS
(March 17, 2007; from Freak Nastty in four-way match; Newark, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION MID-ATLANTIC CHAMPION: BRYAN LOGAN
(October 7, 2006; from Mike Tobin; Newark, DE)

EAST COAST WRESTLING ASSOCIATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: DAN ECKOS & SEAN ROYAL
(January 27, 2007; from The Valedictorians; Newark, DE)

ECW HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: VACANT
(Most recently held by Bobby Lashley)

FULL IMPACT PRO HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: RODERICK STRONG
(November 10, 2006; from Bryan Danielson; Inverness, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: JAY & MARK BRISCOE
(October 14, 2006; from Sean & Phil Davis; Bushnell, FL)

FULL IMPACT PRO FLORIDA HERITAGE CHAMPION: ERICK STEVENS
(March 10, 2007; from Roderick Strong in a tournament final; Crystal River, FL)

HEARTLAND WRESTLING ASSOCIATION HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: BRIAN JENNINGS
(January 2, 2007; from Jon Moxley, Cincinnati, OH)

HEARTLAND WRESTLING ASSOCIATION TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TERIK THE LEGEND & TACK
(March 10, 2007; from Jake & Dave Crist; Evendale, OH)

IWA MID-SOUTH HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: CHUCK TAYLOR
(September 30, 2006; from Toby Klein; Midlothian, IN)

IWF AMERICAN CHAMPION: TRAVIS BLAKE
(January 21, 2007; from Chris Steeler; West Paterson, NJ)

IWF HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: TONY TORRES
(November 17, 2006; from Shawn Donavan; West Paterson, NJ)

IWGP HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: YUJI NAGATA
(April 13, 2007; from Hiroshi Tanahashi; Osaka, Japan)

IWGP INTERNATIONAL TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: GIANT BERNARD & TRAVIS TOMKO
(March 11, 2007; from Manabu Nakanishi & Takao Omori; Nagoya, Japan)

IWGP JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: MINORU
(December 24, 2006; from Koji Kanemoto; Tokyo, Japan)

OVW HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: JAY BRADLEY
(June 1, 2007; from Paul Birchall; Louisville, KY)

OVW SOUTHERN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: BRIAN & BRETT MAJOR
(June 15, 2007; from Charles Evans and Justin LaRoche; Louisville, KY)

OVW TV CHAMPION: SHAWN SPEARS
(March 17, 2007; from Mike Kruel; Louisville, KY)

OVW WOMEN'S CHAMPION: ODB
(June 1, 2007; from Katie Lea; Louisville, KY)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA CHAMPION: EL GENERICO
(February 24, 2007; from Human Tornado; Van Nuys, CA)

PRO WRESTLING GUERRILLA TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: RODERICK STRONG & PAC
(May 20, 2007; from Jay & Mark Briscoe in a tournament final; Burbank, CA)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN CHAMPION: MITSUHARU MISAWA
(December 10, 2006; from Naomichi Marufuji; Tokyo, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN JUNIOR HEAVYWEIGHT CHAMPION: MUSHIKING TERRY
(April 28, 2007; from Tatsuhito Takaiwa; Tokyo, Japan)

PRO WRESTLING NOAH GLOBAL HONORED CROWN TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: JUN AKIYAMA & TAKESHI RIKIO
(April 1, 2007; from Takeshi Morishima & Mohammed Yone; Tokyo, Japan)

RING OF HONOR CHAMPION: TAKESHI MORISHIMA
(February 17, 2007; from Homicide; Philadelphia, PA)

RING OF HONOR TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: JAY & MARK BRISCOE
(March 30, 2007; from Naruki Doi & Shingo; Detroit, MI)

SHIMMER CHAMPION: SARA DEL REY
(June 2, 2007; from Lacey in a tournament final; Berwyn, IL)

TNA WORLD CHAMPION: KURT ANGLE
(June 17, 2007; won newly established title in a five-way "King Of The Mountain" match; Nashville, TN)

TNA WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: TEAM 3D
(May 13, 2007; recognized as the first titleholders by TNA officials)

TNA X CHAMPION: SAMOA JOE
(June 19, 2007; from Jay Lethal in a three-way match; Orlando, FL)

WWE CRUISERWEIGHT CHAMPION: CHAVO GUERRERO JR.
(February 18, 2007; from Gregory Helms; Los Angeles, CA)

WWE INTERCONTINENTAL CHAMPION: SANTINO MARELLA
(April 16, 2007; from Umaga; Milan, Italy)

WWE RAW WORLD CHAMPION: JOHN CENA
(September 17, 2006; from Edge; Toronto, Ontario)

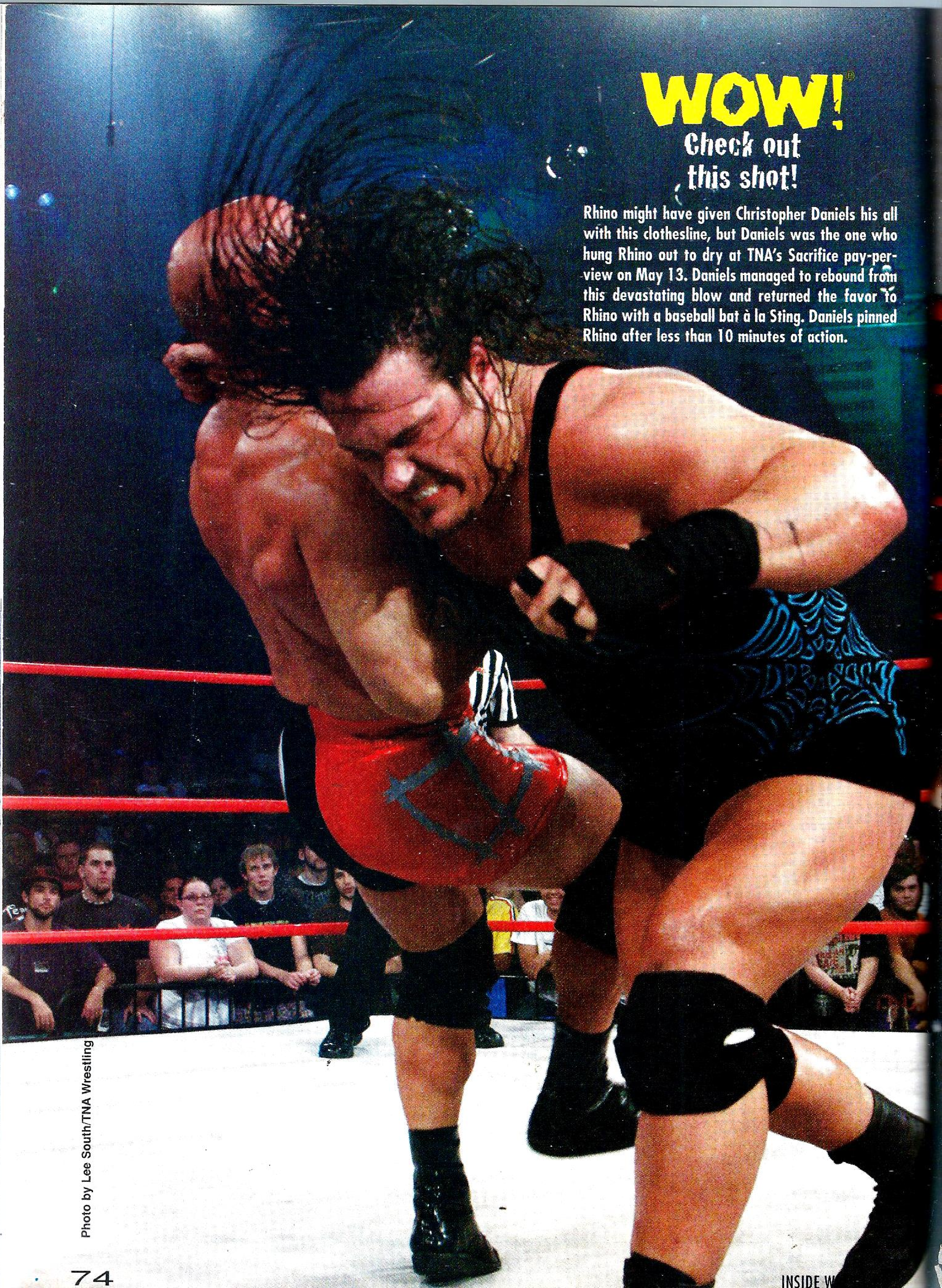
WWE RAW WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: LANCE CADE & TREVOR MURDOCH
(June 4, 2007; from Matt & Jeff Hardy; Tampa, FL)

WWE SMACKDOWN WORLD CHAMPION: EDGE
(May 8, 2007; from The Undertaker; Pittsburgh, PA)

WWE SMACKDOWN WORLD TAG TEAM CHAMPIONS: DEUCE & DOMINO
(April 17, 2007; from Paul London & Brian Kendrick; Milan, Italy)

WWE U.S. CHAMPION: MONTEL VONTAVIOUS PORTER
(May 20, 2007; from Chris Benoit; St. Louis, MO)

WWE WOMEN'S CHAMPION: MELINA
(April 24, 2007; from Mickie James; Paris, France)



WOW!®

Check out this shot!

Rhino might have given Christopher Daniels his all with this clothesline, but Daniels was the one who hung Rhino out to dry at TNA's Sacrifice pay-per-view on May 13. Daniels managed to rebound from this devastating blow and returned the favor to Rhino with a baseball bat à la Sting. Daniels pinned Rhino after less than 10 minutes of action.

Photo by Lee South/TNA Wrestling